DÆDALUS

Upsala College
Library
East Orange, N. J.

MASS CULTURE AND MASS MEDIA

Hannah Arendt
James Baldwin
Ernest van den Haag
Oscar Handlin
H. Stuart Hughes
Stanley Edgar Hyman
Randall Jarrell
Leo Rosten
Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.
Edward Shils
Frank Stanton
James Johnson Sweeney

and others

Spring 1960 $1.2

JOURNAL
of
the
AMERICAN ACADEMY
of ARTS and SCIENCES

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BOARD OF EDITORS

Raymond Aron, P. W. Bridgman, John E. Burchard,
Clarence Faust, Etienne Gilson, Clark Kerr, Konrad Lorenz,
R. M. MacIver, Archibald MacLeish, Paul B. Sears,
Harlow Shapley, Paul Tillich, George Wald

Gerald Holton, *Editor in Chief*
Stephen R. Graubard, *Managing Editor*
Katharine Strelsky, *Assistant Editor*
J. Alden Nichols, *Publication Manager*

ASSOCIATE EDITORS

Daniel Bell, Joseph Campbell, Harlan Cleveland,
Saville R. Davis, Karl W. Deutsch, Frank Freidel,
Dell H. Hymes, Joseph Palamountain,
Richard Pipes, Gardner C. Quarton, Elliot L. Richardson,
Philip Rieff, Lloyd Rodwin, Walter A. Rosenblith,
Seymour Slive, Krister Stendahl, Richard Wilbur

EDITORIAL OFFICE: *Dædalus*, the Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, Little Hall 33, Harvard University, Cambridge 38, Massachusetts. All communications to the Editor should be sent to that address.

PUBLICATION OFFICE: Wesleyan University Press, 356 Washington Street, Middletown, Connecticut. All business correspondence should be sent to the Wesleyan University Press. Issued from 1250 Fairwood Ave., Columbus 16, Ohio.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: *Dædalus* is published quarterly. Subscription rate in the U.S.A. and Canada $4.50 a year; foreign $5.00; single copies (regular issues) $1.25. Subscription orders should be sent to the Publication Office, Wesleyan University Press. CANADA: Burns & MacEachern, 12 Grenville Street, Toronto 5, Ontario. GREAT BRITAIN & EUROPE: W. S. Hall & Co., 696 Keizersgracht, Amsterdam C., Netherlands.

Published jointly by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and the Wesleyan University Press

Printed in the United States of America

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number: 12-30299

Second-class mailing privileges authorized at Columbus, Ohio

Copyright © 1960 *by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences*

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

DÆDALUS

Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences

Contents

271 Preface

273 NORMAN JACOBS
Introduction to the Issue "Mass Culture and Mass Media"

Toward a General Analysis of Mass Culture

278 HANNAH ARENDT
Society and Culture

288 EDWARD SHILS
Mass Society and Its Culture

315 ERNEST VAN DEN HAAG
A Dissent from the Consensual Society

325 OSCAR HANDLIN
Comments on Mass and Popular Culture

Mass Media: The Audience

333 LEO ROSTEN
The Intellectual and the Mass Media

347 FRANK STANTON
Parallel Paths

354 JAMES JOHNSON SWEENEY
The Museum in a Mass Society

Mass Media: The Creative Artist

359 RANDALL JARRELL
A Sad Heart at the Supermarket

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

373 JAMES BALDWIN
Mass Culture and the Creative Artist: Some Personal Notes

Mass Culture: Gains and Losses

377 STANLEY EDGAR HYMAN
Ideals, Dangers, and Limitations of Mass Culture

388 H. STUART HUGHES
Mass Culture and Social Criticism

394 ARTHUR SCHLESINGER, JR.
Notes on a National Cultural Policy

DOCUMENTS

401 De Tocqueville on Democracy and the Arts

410 WILLIAM I. NICHOLS
Editing for 13,000,000 Families

NOTES FROM THE ACADEMY

419 T. S. ELIOT
The Influence of Landscape on the Poet

429 Notes on Contributors

SPRING 1960

ISSUED AS VOL. 89, NO. 2, OF THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE AMERICAN ACADEMY OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Preface

CONTINUING A TRADITION begun auspiciously the previous year with the preparation of our issue on "Education in the Age of Science," *Dædalus* and the Tamiment Institute of New York joined hands again last June and arranged a two-day study conference on Problems of Mass Culture and Mass Media. The twelve essays in the first four sections of this issue were there discussed and subsequently revised by the authors for this publication. The chairman was Paul Lazarsfeld, who, in the relatively tranquil days of 1948, had already put into eloquent words the basic concern shared by many of our authors:

> Twenty or thirty years ago liberal organizations were concerned almost exclusively with questions of social betterment—child labor, woman suffrage, economic insecurity, the exploitation of workers, and so on. These same liberal organizations are today almost as exclusively concerned with the danger of radio, the danger of newspapers, and the bad effects of motion pictures. . . . Broadcasters think of themselves as honest, hard-working, and decent people; why is it, then, that doctors and preachers and teachers dislike them? The liberals of today feel terribly gypped. For decades they and their intellectual ancestors fought to attain certain basic goals—more leisure time, more education, higher wages. They were motivated by the idealistic hope that when these goals were reached, the "masses" would develop into fine human beings. But what happened? After the liberals had won their victories, the people spent their newly acquired time and money on movies, radio, magazines. Instead of listening to Beethoven, they listen to Johnny Mercer, instead of going to Columbia University, they go to the Columbia Broadcasting System. The situation of the liberals is much like that of the high school boy who, after weeks of saving, accumulates enough money to buy a bracelet for a girl, and who then learns that the girl has gone out with another boy to show off her nice new trinket.*

* P. Lazarsfeld, in *Communications in Modern Society* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1948), pp. 191-192.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The range and diversity of the specialized interests of the authors are perhaps the most notable characteristics of this group of essays—a mutual confrontation of managers of mass media (Rosten, Stanton, Nichols), social analysts (Shils, van den Haag, Hyman), creators and curators of cultural objects (Jarrell, Baldwin, Sweeney), and humanistic scholars (Arendt, Handlin, Hughes, Schlesinger). The others in the group of thirty-five participants at the conference also largely reflected these categories.

It would be less than gracious not to record here that the physical details of the meeting were excellently arranged by the Tamiment Institute at its summer center in the Poconos in Pennsylvania. The purpose of the Institute itself is "to foster the cultivation of the arts and sciences and to contribute to an understanding of the nation's social, political, and economic problems." It is under the able direction of Dr. Norman Jacobs, who (in consultation with Dr. Lazarsfeld and the Editor) has served as Guest Editor of this issue of *Dædalus*.

G. H.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

NORMAN JACOBS

Introduction to the Issue "Mass Culture and Mass Media"

ALTHOUGH much has been written about mass society and mass culture in the last three decades, this issue of *Dædalus* needs little apology. Beyond the contemporary scene and the transient scandals involving some of the mass media, there is a growing awareness that the problems generated by the development of mass culture are not indigenous to the United States. Throughout the Western world, industrialization, the growth of the mass media, increasing consumer affluence and leisure are introducing the dilemmas of mass culture to older societies. These problems deserve careful consideration.

In the present group of papers, three basic positions emerge, as they did at the conference described in the preface: those of the "optimist," the "pessimist," and the "meliorist." The last is the most complex. While certain meliorists do not disagree with reservations expressed by the pessimists as to mass culture, and are even prepared to concede that mass culture may eventually destroy elite culture, they do not see this as an inevitable course of events. The meliorists argue that what happens depends very much on what individuals are prepared to do, and on how society responds to the problem. Institutional and educational reform, they suggest, may alter the environment sufficiently so that a more cultivated taste develops within the mass society. It is by no means certain, the meliorists say, that elite culture is doomed: it may in fact be approaching a new stage of development.

Edward Shils is perhaps the chief spokesman for the meliorists in this issue. Claiming that contemporary society is a mass society because the mass of the population is incorporated *into* society, Shils finds the distinguishing features of mass society in industrialization,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

moral equalitarianism, increased social participation, greater individuality, more widely enjoyed personal relationships, and the emergence of an autonomous and affluent youth. Mass society, Shils argues, has witnessed an enormous expansion of the consumption of middle and low culture (in his terminology referred to as "mediocre" and "brutal") as a result of increased affluence, leisure, and literacy. However, this does not mean, Shils says, that high culture ("superior" or "refined") *is* necessarily threatened. On the contrary, the consumption of such products seems also to be on the increase.

Intellectuals believe that elite culture is declining, and they point to the hostility to elite culture on the part of the mass audience, the wastage of talent through popularization, and other such evidence as proof of their assertion. Shils suggests that comparable conditions prevail in all societies. Creative art has always been long and hard. If in fact high culture has declined, Shils says, the causes may have nothing to do with the impact of mass society. They may be due to such factors as poorer genetic endowment, changes in the distribution of genius, the culmination and exhaustion of a given creative tradition, the flow of genius into new fields of endeavor, and shifts in the standards of measurement. Yet even allowing for these factors, Shils finds the evidence of decline unimpressive. In every field of science and scholarship into which so much of our contemporary genius flows, outstanding work is being done.

Having strongly defended contemporary high culture, Shils seems to reverse himself as he stops to consider what in fact may be its deficiencies. He notes that its position in the United States is insecure, and that the creative life is impoverished in many aspects. The fault, he holds, is not with the mass media, but with the Puritan and provincial traditions of American culture, and, more recently, with the tendency toward educational and professional specialization. Specialization, in producing a technical intelligentsia, has brought about the dissolution of the educated public and intellectual community. This obviously has hurt elite culture, and has provided an opening for the mass media. The prospects for elite culture in this country are nonetheless reasonably promising provided vigorous steps are taken to improve the educational system, and if intellectuals and artists will dedicate themselves to their proper calling: the production and consumption of works of the intellect and art.

Ernest van den Haag is the theoretical spokesman for the pessimists. His attack on Shils's position is an integral one; examining mass society, he finds alienation, conformity, vicarious experience,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and invidious leveling its distinguishing characteristics. As for mass culture, this is the half loaf that is worse than none, van den Haag argues. The mass media aim at pleasing the average of consumer tastes; they standardize what they produce, and standardization or homogenization is the death of art. The mass media cannot foster art: they replace it. The temptations of the mass market (money, prestige, and power) seduce and divert potential talent from the creation of art, and contribute further to its decline.

Randall Jarrell and James Baldwin support van den Haag's assault on mass culture, and offer personal testimony to the plight of the creative artist, who works in an environment hostile to creativity, from which he is necessarily alienated. Oscar Handlin suggests that popular art in late nineteenth-century America had a genuine function in the life of the masses—a function it has lost in the contemporary age of mass culture. Hannah Arendt warns that mass culture increasingly utilizes the classics and other genuine works of art, transformed and made digestible, for entertainment. Since the appetites of the entertainment industries are insatiable, they will in time consume the classics, and thereby destroy culture. Stuart Hughes argues that mass culture, with its inherent evils, is the price that has to be paid for democracy.

Leo Rosten is the spokesman for the optimists, though his estimate of the capacity of the mass audience is far from flattering. In Rosten's view, the mass media give the masses what they want, and what they want is largely trashy entertainment. Rosten examines familiar charges against the mass media: that they lack originality; are afraid to step on toes; cannot print or produce the best that is submitted to them; do not deal with the serious problems of our times; sacrifice truth to escapism; corrupt and debase public taste; operate solely for profit; and do not provide an adequate forum for minority views. He suggests that these complaints are not supported by the facts. Rosten insists that the operators of the mass media would be happy to provide superior cultural fare if the audience demands it. If, however, the media move too far ahead of their audience, they may soon have no audience at all. What drags the mass media down to the lowest common cultural denominator is the too common average taste of the masses. Critics of mass culture prefer to ignore these truths for ideological and other reasons, Rosten says, blaming the operators for the deficiencies of the masses, and projecting their own tastes and values on the masses who do not share them.

Frank Stanton argues a more optimistic view of the potentialities

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of the mass audience and of the role of the mass media. Mass media and intellectuals pursue the same goal: more knowledge and greater understanding. Each, however, employs different techniques to reach his objective. He insists that the television industry is meeting its responsibilities to provide serious information and cultural programs, as well as entertainment, in amounts proportionate to the different areas of audience interest. Stanton disagrees with those who argue that advertisers exercise a pernicious influence in television, but admits that the problem of the advertisers' influence on program content has not been satisfactorily solved.

That the disagreements between the three "schools" are deep, no one would wish to deny. This, however, need not obscure certain areas of agreement. All groups, for example, tend to agree with Shils that the vitality of culture in mass society is dependent finally on the vigor and health of elite culture. That the dilution and weakening of the secondary school has adversely affected the quality of elite and middlebrow culture, everyone admits. The strengthening of the public schools thus becomes an objective of the highest priority. Subsidies from the foundations and from government to support Third Programs or to provide patronage for elite art are also looked upon as a desirable goal. These are some of the tangential agreements reached against the background of large and often perplexing disagreements.

At the conference discussion, Ernest Nagel spoke for many when he expressed his unhappiness with the quality of much of the evidence introduced to support the various positions. Nagel thought too much of it anecdotal. Daniel Bell declared that too many of the generalizations were based on flimsy evidence. Implicit in these criticisms was the suggestion that the conflicting positions were based on all-or-nothing generalizations that went beyond the evidence, and that a more qualified affirmation would produce less disagreement.

Even within a context of qualified affirmation, it would still be essential to determine the direction of developing tendencies in mass culture. Shils and van den Haag, for example, disagreed as to whether mass society is producing a deterioration or an improvement in the qualitative level of the culture consumed by the masses. Both were able to find evidence to support their contentions. Patrick Hazard introduced a new factor into the discussion when he claimed that mass society has opened up new areas of cultural achievement in

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the fields of industrial design, architecture, landscaping, furniture, and household objects. Stanley Edgar Hyman and others cited the vast increase in the consumption of classical music and serious literature, made possible by the mass production of cheap records and paperbacks. Of course, these arguments do not prove the meliorists' case. But how are they to be weighed in any estimate of the worth of modern culture?

A similar problem bedeviled the discussion of elite culture. Van den Haag said that mass culture tends to destroy elite culture. Hannah Arendt, a pessimist like van den Haag, declared, however, that the twentieth century is a century of great art. This led Sidney Hook to ask whether mass culture has had the corrupting effects suggested by van den Haag. We thus must know how the condition of elite culture is to be measured, and how causal connections accounting for its development are to be established. In the 'twenties and 'thirties American fiction enjoyed one of its great periods; latterly it is in decline. Is this due to the corrosive effects of mass culture, or to some other cause? Meanwhile, since the end of World War II American painting has reached a peak of creativity. How is this development to be weighed, and how is it to be evaluated in the context of generalizations prophesying the demise of high culture?

The resolution of these issues must await the accumulation of more relevant evidence and the development of more refined instruments of social analysis and comparative historical measurement. Even then, perhaps, a resolution may not be forthcoming. It is chastening to note that the debate that raged in the eighteenth century with the appearance of the novel and of lending libraries contains remarkable parallels to the contemporary discussion. Pessimist, optimist, and meliorist may represent basic enduring types of character and attitude that will not yield to the most conclusive evidence or the most refined analysis. If this is so, their debate is one of the perennial debates of the intellect. The following pages present it to the readers of *Dædalus* in its contemporary form.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

HANNAH ARENDT

Society and Culture

MASS CULTURE and mass society (the very terms were still a sign of reprobation a few years ago, implying that mass society was a depraved form of society and mass culture a contradiction in terms) are considered by almost everybody today as something with which we must come to terms, and in which we must discover some "positive" aspects—if only because mass culture is the culture of a mass society. And mass society, whether we like it or not, is going to stay with us into the foreseeable future. No doubt mass society and mass culture are interrelated phenomena. Mass society comes about when "the mass of the population has become incorporated into society."* Since society originally comprehended those parts of the population which disposed of leisure time and the wealth which goes with it, mass society does indeed indicate a new order in which the masses have been liberated "from the burden of physically exhausting labor."† Historically as well as conceptually, therefore, mass society has been preceded by society, and society is no more a generic term than is mass society; it too can be dated and described historically. It is older, to be sure, than mass society, but not older than the modern age. In fact, all the traits that crowd psychology has meanwhile discovered in mass man: his loneliness (and loneliness is neither isolation nor solitude) regardless of his adaptability; his excitability and lack of standards; his capacity for consumption, accompanied by inability to judge or even to distinguish; above all, his egocentricity and that fateful alienation from the world which, since Rousseau, he mistakes for self-alienation—all these traits first appeared in "good society," where there was no question of masses, numerically speaking. The first mass men, we are tempted to say, quantitatively

*Edward Shils, see page 288.
†*Ibid.*, page 289.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

so little constituted a mass that they could even imagine they constituted an elite, the elite of good society.

Let me therefore first say a few words on the older phenomena of society and its relation to culture: say them not primarily for historical reasons, but because they relate facts that seem to me little known in this country. It may be this lack of knowledge that leads Mr. Shils to say "individuality has flowered in mass society," whereas actually the modern individual was defined and, indeed, discovered by those who—like Rousseau in the eighteenth or John Stuart Mill in the nineteenth century—found themselves in open rebellion against society. Individualism and the "sensibility and privacy" which go with it—the discovery of intimacy as the atmosphere the individual needs for his full development—came about at a time when society was not yet a mass phenomenon but still thought of itself in terms of "good society" or (especially in Central Europe) of "educated and cultured society." And it is against this background that we must understand the modern (and no longer so modern) individual who, as we all know from nineteenth- and twentieth-century novels, can only be understood as part of the society against which he tried to assert himself and which always got the better of him.

The chances of this individual's survival lay in the simultaneous presence within the population of other nonsociety strata into which the rebellious individual could escape; one reason why rebellious individuals so frequently ended by becoming revolutionaries as well was that they discovered in those who were not admitted to society certain traits of humanity which had become extinct in society. We need only read the record of the French Revolution, and recall to what an extent the very concept of *le peuple* received its connotations from a rebellion against the corruption and hypocrisy of the salons, to realize what the true role of society was throughout the nineteenth century. A good part of the despair of individuals under the conditions of mass society is due to the fact that these avenues of escape are, of course, closed as soon as society has incorporated all the strata of the population.

Generally speaking, I think it has been the great good fortune of this country to have this intermediary stage of good and cultured society play a relatively minor role in its development; but the disadvantage of this good fortune today is that those few who will still make a stand against mass culture as an unavoidable consequence of mass society are tempted to look upon these earlier phenomena of society and culture as a kind of golden age and lost paradise,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

precisely because they know so little of it. America has been only too well acquainted with the barbarian philistinism of the *nouveau riche*, but it has only a nodding acquaintance with the equally annoying cultural and educated philistinism of a society where culture actually has what Mr. Shils calls "snob-value," and where it is a matter of status to be educated.

This cultural philistinism is today in Europe rather a matter of the past, for the simple reason that the whole development of modern art started from and remained committed to a profound mistrust not only of cultural philistinism but also of the word culture itself. It is still an open question whether it is more difficult to discover the great authors of the past without the help of any tradition than it is to rescue them from the rubbish of educated philistinism. And this task of preserving the past without the help of tradition, and often even against traditional standards and interpretations, is the same for the whole of Western civilization. Intellectually, though not socially, America and Europe are in the same situation: the thread of tradition is broken, and we must discover the past for ourselves—that is, read its authors as though nobody had ever read them before. In this task, mass society is much less in our way than good and educated society, and I suspect that this kind of reading was not uncommon in nineteenth-century America precisely because this country was still that "unstoried wilderness" from which so many American writers and artists tried to escape. That American fiction and poetry have so suddenly and richly come into their own, ever since Whitman and Melville, may have something to do with this.

It would be unfortunate indeed if out of the dilemmas and distractions of mass culture and mass society there should arise an altogether unwarranted and idle yearning for a state of affairs which is not better but only a bit more old-fashioned. And the eager and uncritical acceptance of such obviously snobbish and philistine terms as highbrow, middlebrow, and lowbrow is a rather ominous sign. For the only nonsocial and authentic criterion for works of culture is, of course, their relative permanence and even their ultimate immortality. The point of the matter is that as soon as the immortal works of the past became the object of "refinement" and acquired the status which went with it, they lost their most important and elemental quality, which is to grasp and move the reader or spectator, throughout the centuries. The very word "culture" became suspect precisely because it indicated that "pursuit of perfection" which to Matthew Arnold was identical with the "pursuit of sweet-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ness and light." It was not Plato, but a reading of Plato, prompted by the ulterior motive of self-perfection, that became suspect; and the "pursuit of sweetness and light," with all its overtones of good society, was held in contempt because of its rather obvious effort to keep reality out of one's life by looking at everything through a veil of sweetness and light. The astounding recovery of the creative arts in the twentieth century, and a less apparent but perhaps no less real recovery of the greatness of the past, began when good society lost its monopolizing grip on culture, together with its dominant position in society as a whole.

Here we are not concerned with society, however, but with culture —or rather with what happens to culture under the different conditions of society and of mass society. In society, culture, even more than other realities, had become what only then began to be called a "value," that is, a social commodity which could be circulated and cashed in on as social coinage for the purpose of acquiring social status. Cultural objects were transformed into values when the cultural philistine seized upon them as a currency by which he bought a higher position in society—higher, that is, than in his own opinion he deserved either by nature or by birth. Cultural values, therefore, were what values have always been, exchange values; in passing from hand to hand, they were worn down like an old coin. They lost the faculty which is originally peculiar to all cultural things, the faculty of arresting our attention and moving us. This process of transformation was called the devaluation of values, and its end came with the "bargain-sale of values" (*Ausverkauf der Werte*) during the 'twenties and 'thirties, when cultural and moral values were "sold out" together.

Perhaps the chief difference between society and mass society is that society wanted culture, evaluated and devaluated cultural things into social commodities, used and abused them for its own selfish purposes, but did not "consume" them. Even in their most worn-out shapes, these things remained things, they were not "consumed" and swallowed up but retained their worldly objectivity. Mass society, on the contrary, wants not culture but entertainment, and the wares offered by the entertainment industry are indeed consumed by society just as are any other consumer goods. The products needed for entertainment serve the life process of society, even though they may not be as necessary for this life as bread and meat. They serve, as the phrase is, to while away time, and the vacant time which is whiled away is not leisure time, strictly speaking, that is,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

time in which we are truly liberated from all cares and activities necessitated by the life process, and therefore free for the world and its "culture"; it is rather leftover time, which still is biological in nature, leftover after labor and sleep have received their due. Vacant time which entertainment is supposed to fill is a hiatus in the biologically conditioned cycle of labor, in "the metabolism of man with nature," as Marx used to say.

Under modern conditions, this hiatus is constantly growing; there is more and more time freed that must be filled with entertainment, but this enormous increase in vacant time does not change the nature of the time. Entertainment, like labor and sleep, is irrevocably part of the biological life process. And biological life is always, whether one is laboring or at rest, engaged in consumption or in the passive reception of amusement, a metabolism feeding on things by devouring them. The commodities the entertainment industry offers are not "things"—cultural objects whose excellence is measured by their ability to withstand the life process and to become permanent appurtenances of the world—and they should not be judged according to these standards; nor are they values which exist to be used and exchanged; they are rather consumer goods destined to be used up, as are any other consumer goods.

Panis et circenses truly belong together; both are necessary for life, for its preservation and recuperation, and both vanish in the course of the life process—that is, both must constantly be produced anew and offered anew, lest this process cease entirely. The standards by which both should be judged are indeed freshness and novelty—standards by which we today (and, I think, quite mistakenly) judge cultural and artistic objects as well, things which are supposed to remain in the world even after we have left it.

As long as the entertainment industry produces its own consumer goods, all is well, and we can no more reproach it for the nondurability of its articles than we can reproach a bakery because it produces goods which, if they are not to spoil, must be consumed as soon as they are made. It has always been the mark of educated philistinism to despise entertainment and amusement because no "value" could be derived from them. In so far as we are all subject to life's great cycle, we all stand in need of entertainment and amusement in some form or other, and it is sheer hypocrisy or social snobbery to deny that we can be amused and entertained by exactly the same things which amuse and entertain the masses of our fellow men. As far as the survival of culture is concerned, it certainly is

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

less threatened by those who fill vacant time with amusement and entertainment than by those who fill it with some haphazard educational gadget in order to improve their social standing.

If mass culture and the entertainment industry were the same, I should not worry much, even though it is true that, in Mr. Shils's words, "the immense advance in audibility and visibility" of this whole sector of life, which formerly had been "relatively silent and unseen by the intellectuals," creates a serious problem for the artist and intellectual. It is as though the futility inherent in entertainment had been permitted to permeate the whole social atmosphere, and the often described malaise of the artists and intellectuals is of course partly due to their inability to make themselves heard and seen in the tumultuous uproar of mass society, or to penetrate its noisy futility. But this protest of the artist against society is as old as society, though not older; the great revival of nearly all the arts in our century (which perhaps one day will seem one of the great artistic—and of course scientific—periods of Western civilization) began with the malaise of the artist in society, with his decision to turn his back upon it and its "values," to leave the dead to bury the dead. As far as artistic productivity is concerned, it should not be more difficult to withstand the massive temptations of mass culture, or to keep from being thrown out of gear by the noise and humbug of mass society, than it was to avoid the more sophisticated temptations and the more insidious noises of the cultural snobs in refined society.

Unhappily, the case is not that simple. The entertainment industry is confronted with gargantuan appetites, and since its wares disappear in consumption, it must constantly offer new commodities. In this predicament, those who produce for the mass media ransack the entire range of past and present culture in the hope of finding suitable material. This material, however, cannot be offered as it is; it must be prepared and altered in order to become entertaining; it cannot be consumed as it is.

Mass culture comes into being when mass society seizes upon cultural objects, and its danger is that the life process of society (which like all biological processes insatiably draws everything available into the cycle of its metabolism) will literally consume the cultural objects, eat them up and destroy them. I am not referring to the phenomenon of mass distribution. When cultural objects, books, or pictures in reproduction, are thrown on the market cheaply and attain huge sales, this does not affect the nature of the goods in question. But their nature is affected when these objects them-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

selves are changed (rewritten, condensed, digested, reduced to *Kitsch* in the course of reproduction or preparation for the movies) in order to be put into usable form for a mass sale which they otherwise could not attain.

Neither the entertainment industry itself nor mass sales as such are signs of, not what we call mass culture, but what we ought more accurately to call the decay of culture in mass society. This decay sets in when liberties are taken with these cultural objects in order that they may be distributed among masses of people. Those who actively promote this decay are not the Tin Pan Alley composers but a special kind of intellectuals, often well read and well informed, whose sole function is to organize, disseminate, and change cultural objects in order to make them palatable to those who want to be entertained or—and this is worse—to be "educated," that is, to acquire as cheaply as possible some kind of cultural knowledge to improve their social status.

Richard Blackmur (in a recent article on the "Role of the Intellectual," in the *Kenyon Review*) has brilliantly shown that the present malaise of the intellectual springs from the fact that he finds himself surrounded, not by the masses, from whom, on the contrary, he is carefully shielded, but by these digesters, re-writers, and changers of culture whom we find in every publishing house in the United States, and in the editorial offices of nearly every magazine. And these "professionals" are ably assisted by those who no longer write books but fabricate them, who manufacture a "new" textbook out of four or five already on the market, and who then have, as Blackmur shows, only one worry—how to avoid plagiarism. (Meanwhile the editor does his best to substitute clichés for sheer illiteracy.) Here the criterion of novelty, quite legitimate in the entertainment industry, becomes a simple fake and, indeed, a threat: it is only too likely that the "new" textbook will crowd out the older ones, which usually are better, not because they are older, but because they were still written in response to authentic needs.

This state of affairs, which indeed is equaled nowhere else in the world, can properly be called mass culture; its promoters are neither the masses nor their entertainers, but are those who try to entertain the masses with what once was an authentic object of culture, or to persuade them that *Hamlet* can be as entertaining as *My Fair Lady*, and educational as well. The danger of mass education is precisely that it may become very entertaining indeed; there are many great authors of the past who have survived centuries of

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

oblivion and neglect, but it is still an open question whether they will be able to survive an entertaining version of what they have to say.

The malaise of the intellectual in the atmosphere of mass culture is much more legitimate than his malaise in mass society; it is caused socially by the presence of these other intellectuals, the manufacturers of mass culture, from whom he finds it difficult to distinguish himself and who, moreover, always outnumber him, and therefore acquire that kind of power which is generated whenever people band together and act more or less in concert. The power of the many (legitimate only in the realm of politics and the field of action) has always been a threat to the strength of the few; it is a threat under the most favorable circumstances, and it has always been felt to be more dangerous when it arises from within a group's own ranks. Culturally, the malaise is caused, I think, not so much by the massive temptations and the high rewards which await those who are willing to alter their products to make them acceptable for a mass market, as by the constant irritating care each of us has to exert in order to protect his product against the demands and the ingenuity of those who think they know how to "improve" it.

Culture relates to objects and is a phenomenon of the world; entertainment relates to people and is a phenomenon of life. If life is no longer content with the pleasure which is always coexistent with the toil and labor inherent in the metabolism of man with nature, if vital energy is no longer fully used up in this cycle, then life may reach out for the things of the world, may violate and consume them. It will prepare these things of the world until they are fit for consumption; it will treat them as if they were articles of nature, articles which must also be prepared before they can enter into man's metabolism.

Consumption of the things of nature does no harm to them; they are constantly renewed because man, in so far as he lives and labors, toils and recuperates, is also a creature of nature, a part of the great cycle in which all nature wheels. But the things of the world which are made by man (in so far as he is a worldly and not merely a natural being), these things are not renewed of their own accord. When life seizes upon them and consumes them at its pleasure, for entertainment, they simply disappear. And this disappearance, which first begins in mass culture—that is, the "culture" of a society poised between the alternatives of laboring and of consuming—is something different from the wear and tear culture suffered when its things were made into exchange values, and circulated in society until their original stamp and meaning were scarcely recognizable.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

If we wish to classify these two anticultural processes in historical and sociological terms, we may say that the devaluation of culture in good society through the cultural philistines was the characteristic peril of commercial society, whose primary public area was the exchange market for goods and ideas. The disappearance of culture in a mass society, on the other hand, comes about when we have a consumers' society which, in so far as it produces only for consumption, does not need a public worldly space whose existence is independent of and outside the sphere of its life process. In other words, a consumers' society does not know how to take care of the world and the things which belong to it: the society's own chief attitude toward objects, the attitude of consumption, spells ruin to everything it touches. If we understand by culture what it originally meant (the Roman *cultura*—derived from *colere*, to take care of and preserve and cultivate) then we can say without any exaggeration that a society obsessed with consumption cannot at the same time be cultured or produce a culture.

For all their differences, however, one thing is common to both these anticultural processes: they arise when all the worldly objects produced by the present or the past have become "social," are related to society, and are seen in their merely functional aspect. In the one case, society uses and exchanges, evaluates and devaluates them; in the other, it devours and consumes them. This functionalization or "societization" of the world is by no means a matter of course; the notion that every object must be functional, fulfilling some needs of society or of the individual—the church a religious need, the painting the need for self-expression in the painter and the need of self-perfection in the onlooker, and so on—is historically so new that one is tempted to speak of a modern prejudice. The cathedrals were built *ad majorem gloriam Dei;* while they as buildings certainly served the needs of the community, their elaborate beauty can never be explained by these needs, which could have been served quite as well by any nondescript building.

An object is cultural to the extent that it can endure; this durability is the very opposite of its functionality, which is the quality which makes it disappear again from the phenomenal world by being used and used up. The "thingness" of an object appears in its shape and appearance, the proper criterion of which is beauty. If we wanted to judge an object by its use value alone, and not also by its appearance (that is, by whether it is beautiful or ugly or something in between), we would first have to pluck out our eyes.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Thus, the functionalization of the world which occurs in both society and mass society deprives the world of culture as well as beauty. Culture can be safe only with those who love the world for its own sake, who know that without the beauty of man-made, worldly things which we call works of art, without the radiant glory in which potential imperishability is made manifest to the world and in the world, all human life would be futile and no greatness could endure.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDWARD SHILS

Mass Society and Its Culture

Mass Society: Consensus, Civility, Individuality

A NEW ORDER of society has taken form since the end of World War I in the United States, above all, but also in Great Britain, France, Northern Italy, the Low and Northern European countries, and Japan. Some of its features have begun to appear in Eastern and Central Europe, though in a less even manner; more incipiently and prospectively so, in Asian and African countries. It is the style to refer to this new order as the "mass society."

This new order of society, despite all its internal conflicts, discloses in the individual a greater sense of attachment to the society as a whole, and of affinity with his fellows. As a result, perhaps for the first time in history, large aggregations of human beings living over an extensive territory have been able to enter into relatively free and uncoerced association.

The new society is a mass society precisely in the sense that the mass of the population has become incorporated *into* society. The center of society—the central institutions, and the central value systems which guide and legitimate these institutions—has extended its boundaries. Most of the population (the "mass") now stands in a closer relationship to the center than has been the case in either premodern societies or in the earlier phases of modern society. In previous societies, a substantial portion of the population, often the majority, were born and forever remained "outsiders."

The mass society is a new phenomenon, but it has been long in gestation. The idea of the *polis* is its seed, nurtured and developed in the Roman idea of a common citizenship extending over a wide territory. The growth of nationality in the modern era has heightened the sense of affinity among the members of different classes and regions of the same country. When the proponents of the modern idea of the nation put forward the view that life on a contiguous, con-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tinuous, and common territory—beyond all divisions of kinship, caste, and religious belief—united the human beings living within that territory into a single collectivity, and when they made a common language the evidence of that membership, they committed themselves, not often wittingly, to the mass society.

An important feature of that society is the diminished sacredness of authority, the reduction in the awe it evokes and in the charisma attributed to it. This diminution in the status of authority runs parallel to a loosening of the power of tradition. Naturally, tradition continues to exert influence, but it becomes more open to divergent interpretations, and these frequently lead to divergent courses of action.

The dispersion of charisma from center outward has manifested itself in a greater stress on individual dignity and individual rights. This extension does not always reach into the sphere of the political, but it is apparent in the attitudes toward women, youth, and ethnic groups which have been in a disadvantageous position.

Following from this, one of the features of mass society I should like to emphasize is its wide dispersion of "civility." The concept of civility is not a modern creation, but it is in the mass society that it has found its most complete (though still very incomplete) realization. The very idea of a *citizenry* coterminous with the adult population is one of its signs. So is the moral equalitarianism which is a trait unique to the West, with its insistence that by virtue of their sharing membership in the community and a common tongue men possess a certain irreducible dignity.

None of these characteristic tendencies of mass society has attained anything like full realization. The moral consensus of mass society is certainly far from complete; the mutual assimilation of center (i.e., the elite) and periphery (i.e., the mass) is still much less than total. Class conflict, ethnic prejudice, and disordered personal relations remain significant factors in our modern mass societies, but without preventing the tendencies I have described from finding an historically unprecedented degree of realization.

Mass society is an industrial society. Without industry, i.e., without the replacement of simple tools by complicated machines, mass society would be inconceivable. Modern industrial techniques, through the creation of an elaborate network of transportation and communication, bring the various parts of mass society into frequent contact. Modern technology has liberated man from the burden of physically exhausting labor, and has given him resources through which new

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

experiences of sensation, conviviality, and introspection have become possible. True, modern industrial organization has also been attended by a measure of hierarchical and bureaucratic organization which often runs contrary to the vital but loose consensus of mass society. Nonetheless, the fact remains that modern mass society has reached out toward a moral consensus and a civil order congruous with the adult population. The sacredness that every man possesses by virtue of his membership in society finds a more far-reaching affirmation than ever before.

Mass society has aroused and enhanced individuality. Individuality is characterized by an openness to experience, an efflorescence of sensation and sensibility, a sensitivity to other minds and personalities. It gives rise to, and lives in, personal attachments; it grows from the expansion of the empathic capacities of the human being. Mass society has liberated the cognitive, appreciative, and moral capacities of individuals. Larger elements of the population have consciously learned to value the pleasures of eye, ear, taste, touch, and conviviality. People make choices more freely in many spheres of life, and these choices are not necessarily made for them by tradition, authority, or scarcity. The value of the experience of personal relationships is more widely appreciated.

These observations are not meant to imply that individuality as developed in mass society exists universally. A part of the population in mass society lives in a nearly vegetative torpor, reacting dully or aggressively to its environment. Nonetheless, the search for individuality and its manifestations in personal relations are distinctly present in mass society and constitute one of its essential features.

The Culture of Mass Society

The fundamental categories of cultural life are the same in all societies. In all the different strata of any given society, the effort to explore and explain the universe, to understand the meaning of events, to enter into contact with the sacred or to commit sacrilege, to affirm the principles of morality and justice and to deny them, to encounter the unknown, to exalt or denigrate authority, to stir the senses by the control of and response to words, sounds, shapes, and colors—these are the basic elements of cultural existence. There are, however, profound variations in the elaboration of these elements, for human beings show marked differences in capacity for expression and reception.

No society can ever achieve a complete cultural consensus: there

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

are natural limitations to the spread of the standards and products of superior culture throughout society. The tradition of refinement is itself replete with antinomies, and the nature of creativity adds to them. Creativity is a modification of tradition. Furthermore, the traditional transmission of superior culture inevitably stirs some to reject and deny significant parts of it, just because it is traditional. More fundamental than the degrees of creativity and alienation is the disparity in human cognitive, appreciative, and moral capacities. This disparity produces marked differences in the apprehension of tradition, in the complexity of the response to it, and in the substance of the judgments aroused by it.

Thus a widely differentiated "dissensus" has become stabilized in the course of history. The pattern of this "dissensus" is not inevitably unchanging. The classes consuming culture may diminish in number, their taste may deteriorate, their standards become less discriminating or more debased. On the other hand, as the mass of the population comes awake when its curiosity and sensibility and its moral responsiveness are aroused, it begins to become capable of a more subtle perception, more appreciative of the more general elements in a concrete representation, and more complex in its aesthetic reception and expression.

The Levels of Culture. For present purposes, we shall employ a very rough distinction among three levels of culture, which are levels of quality measured by aesthetic, intellectual, and moral standards. These are "superior" or "refined" culture, "mediocre" culture, and "brutal" culture.*

* I have reservations about the use of the term "mass culture," because it refers simultaneously to the substantive and qualitative properties of the culture, to the social status of its consumers, and to the media by which it is transmitted. Because of this at least three-fold reference, it tends to beg some important questions regarding the relations among the three variables. For example, the current conception of "mass culture" does not allow for the fact that in most countries, and not just at present, very large sections of the elite consume primarily mediocre and brutal culture. It also begs the important questions as to whether the mass media can transmit works of superior culture, or whether the genres developed by the new mass media can become the occasions of creativity and therewith a part of superior culture. Also, it does not consider the obvious fact that much of what is produced in the genres of superior culture is extremely mediocre in quality. At present, I have no satisfactory set of terms to distinguish the three levels of cultural objects. I have toyed with "high," "refined," "elaborate," "genuine," or "serious," "vulgar," "mediocre," or "middle," and "low," "brutal," "base" or "coarse." None of these words succeeds either in felicity or aptness.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Superior or refined culture is distinguished by the seriousness of its subject matter, i.e., the centrality of the problems with which it deals, the acute penetration and coherence of its perceptions, the subtlety and wealth of its expressed feeling. The stock of superior culture includes the great works of poetry, novels, philosophy, scientific theory and research, statues, paintings, musical compositions and their performance, the texts and performance of plays, history, economic, social, and political analyses, architecture and works of craftsmanship. It goes without saying that the category of superior culture does not refer to the social status, i.e., the quality of their attainment, of the author or of the consumers of the works in question, but only to their truth and beauty.

The category of mediocre culture includes works which, whatever the aspiration of their creators, do not measure up to the standards employed in judging works of superior culture. Mediocre culture is less original than superior culture; it is more reproductive; it operates largely in the same genres as superior culture, but also in certain relatively novel genres not yet fully incorporated into superior culture, such as the musical comedy. This may be a function of the nature of the genre or of the fact that the genre has not yet attracted great talent to its practice.

At the third level is brutal culture, where symbolic elaboration is of a more elementary order. Some of the genres on this level are identical with those of mediocre and refined culture (pictorial and plastic representation, music, poems, novels, and stories) but they also include games, spectacles (such as boxing and horse racing) and more directly expressive actions with a minimal symbolic content. The depth of penetration is almost always negligible, subtlety is almost entirely lacking, and a general grossness of sensitivity and perception is a common feature.

The greatest difference among the three levels of culture, apart from intrinsic quality, is the tremendous disparity in the richness of the stock available in any society at any given time. What any given society possesses is not only what it creates in its own generation but also what it has received from antecedent generations and from earlier and contemporaneous generations of other societies. Superior culture is immeasurably richer in content because it contains not only superior contemporary production but also much of the refined production of earlier epochs. Mediocre culture tends to be poorer, not only because of the poorer quality of what it produces in its own generation, but because these cultural products have a relatively

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shorter life span. Nevertheless, mediocre culture contains much that has been created in the past. The boundaries between mediocre and superior culture are not so sharp, and the custodians of superior culture are not so discriminating as always to reject the mediocre. Furthermore, a considerable amount of mediocre culture retains value over long periods; and even though mediocre taste varies, as does superior taste, there are stable elements in it, too, so that some of the mediocre culture of the past continues to find an appreciative audience.

At the lowest cultural level, where the symbolic content is most impoverished and where there is very little original creation in each generation, we come again to a greater, if much less self-conscious, dependence on the past. Games, jokes, spectacles, and the like continue traditional patterns with little consciousness of their traditionality. If the traditional element in brutal culture has been large, this is due to the relatively low creative capacities of those who produce and consume it. Here, until recently, there has been little professional production, machinery for preservation and transmission is lacking, and oral transmission plays a greater part in maintaining traditions of expression and performance than with superior and mediocre cultures.

The Magnitudes: Consumption. The quantity of culture consumed in mass society is certainly greater than in any other epoch, even if we make proper allowance for the larger populations of the mass societies at present. It is especially at the levels of mediocre and brutal culture that an immense expansion has occurred, but the consumption of superior culture has also increased.

The grounds for this great increase, and for the larger increase in the two lower categories, are not far to seek. The most obvious are greater availability, increased leisure time, the decreased physical demands of work, the greater affluence of the classes which once worked very hard for long hours for small income, increased literacy, enhanced individuality, and more unabashed hedonism. In all these, the middle and the lower classes have gained more than have the elites (including the intellectuals, whatever their occupational distribution).

The consumption of superior culture has increased, too, but not as much as the other two categories, because the intellectual classes were more nearly saturated before the age of mass society. Moreover, the institutions of superior culture—the collections of connoisseurs, academies, universities, libraries, publishing houses, periodicals—

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

were more elaborately and more continuously established in the pre-mass society than were the institutions which made mediocre and brutal culture available to their consumers.

Thus in mass society the proportion of the total stock of cultural objects held by superior culture has shrunk, and correspondingly the share of mediocre and brutal culture has grown.*

Note on the Value of Mediocre and Brutal Culture. Mediocre culture has many merits. It often has elements of genuine conviviality, not subtle or profound perhaps, but genuine in the sense of being spontaneous and honest. It is often very good fun. Moreover, it is often earnestly, even if simply, moral. Mediocre culture, too, has its traditions; many of the dramas and stories which regale the vulgar have a long history hidden from those who tell and enjoy them. Like anything traditional, they express something essential in human life, and expunging them would expunge the accumulated wisdom of ordinary men and women, their painfully developed art of coping with the miseries of existence, their routine pieties and their decent pleasures.

There is much ridicule of *Kitsch,* and it *is* ridiculous. Yet it represents aesthetic sensibility and aesthetic aspiration, untutored, rude, and deformed. The very growth of *Kitsch,* and of the demand which has generated the industry for the production of *Kitsch,* is an indication of a crude aesthetic awakening in classes which previously accepted what was handed down to them or who had practically no aesthetic expression and reception.

The Reproduction and Transmission of Culture

In medieval society, the church and, to a less effective and more limited degree, the schools (which were immediate or indirect adjuncts of the church) brought the culture of the center into the peripheral areas of a very loosely integrated society.† Protestantism

* This change in the relative shares of the three levels of culture has been distorted by contrast with the preceding epochs. The cultural life of the consumers of mediocre and brutal culture was relatively silent, unseen by the intellectuals. The immense advances in audibility and visibility of the two lower levels of culture is one of the most noticeable traits of mass society. This is in turn intensified by another trait of mass society, i.e., the enhanced mutual awareness of different sectors of the society.

† A society which was far less "organic" in its structure and outlook than the critics of modern society allege and less "organic" also than the modern society which is so unsympathetically assailed by these critics.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and printing led to a pronounced change which showed the direction of the future. The cheapened access to the printed word and the spread of a minimal literacy (which became nearly universal within European societies only at the beginning of the present century) resulted in an expansion of each of the three strata of culture. In this expansion, the chief beneficiaries were mediocre and brutal culture.

The increased wealth, leisure, and literacy of the lower classes, and the flowering of hedonism which these permitted, would undoubtedly have produced the great expansion in mediocre and brutal—as well as superior—cultural consumption, even without the further technological developments of communication in the twentieth century. This technological development did, however, supply a mighty additional impetus. The popular press of the last decades of the nineteenth century showed the way. The development of new methods of graphic reproduction in lithography and in both still and moving pictures, new methods of sound recording and the transmission of sound and picture, increased the flow of communication from the center to the periphery. Where previously the custodians of superior culture and its mediocre variants had nearly a monopoly—through their quasi-monopoly of the institutions of transmission—the new methods of mass communication have transformed the situation.

The quest for a larger audience, which would make it feasible to obtain a subsidy (in the form of advertising) to cover the difference between what the consumers pay and what it costs to produce cultural objects, has been of the greatest importance to the interrelations of the various strata of culture. The dependence of the subsidy on greatly extended consumption would in itself have required a reaching-out toward a heterogeneous audience. The increased overhead of communication enterprises in television, for example, as compared with book printing, has intensified the need for large and heterogeneous audiences.

Before the emergence of the most recent forms of mass communication, with their very large capital requirements, each stratum of culture had its own channels and institutions. As long as books were the chief means of impersonal cultural transmission, the cultural segregation of the classes could be easily maintained. The drive toward a maximum audience has helped change this, and the change has had momentous repercussions. The magazine is the embodiment of this new development. The form of the magazine is an eighteenth-century phenomenon; but the enlargement of its role in the reproduction and transmission of culture is the product of the latter-day

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

need to gain the maximum audience, one in its turn impelled by the economic necessity of the subsidy. To speak to the largest possible audience, it has been necessary to make the content of what is transmitted in a single issue as heterogeneous as the audience sought.

The general principle of providing something for everyone in the family became well established in the first decades of the popular press. The principle was developed to the point where every class which could possibly increase the total audience was offered something. This principle has not succeeded in dominating the entire field. There are still specialized organs and institutions which seek to please only one particular stratum of consumers, and in Europe the tradition of a unitary public still persists—but even there not without making very substantial concessions to the new principle. Even the universities (which do not necessarily seek large numbers) in Europe, although not as much as in America, have also diversified their programs in order to meet the diversified demand. In popular periodicals like *Time, Life, Look, Picture Post, Match, Der Spiegel, Esquire,* and in distinguished daily newspapers like *The New York Times,* and recently, even in a cumbersome way, *The Times* of London, there is an intermixture of superior, mediocre, and brutal culture which is historically unique. The same can be observed in television and, of course, in the film: a single network presents a wide variety of levels, and films of genuinely high artistic and intellectual merit may be produced in the same studio which produces numerous mediocre and brutal films.

The Consumption of Culture

In modern society, the number of consumers of superior culture has never been very large; in premodern societies, it was even smaller. The chief consumers of works of superior culture are the intellectuals, i.e., those whose occupations require intellectual preparation, and in practice, the application of high intellectual skills. In the contemporary world this category includes university teachers, scientists, university students, writers, artists, secondary-school teachers, members of the learned professions (law, medicine, and the church), journalists, and higher civil servants, as well as a scattering of businessmen, engineers, and army officers.

Outside the intellectual occupations, where the largest number are found, the consumers of superior culture are spread thin and at random. This situation has probably never been different, even in periods when the princes of the church were patrons of painting and

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sculpture, or when in most grand-bourgeois households one could find sets of Goethe, Nietzsche, Fielding, the memoirs of Sully, or the letters of Mme. de Sévigné.

The political, technological, military, ecclesiastical, and economic elites have not usually been intellectuals, even though their members have had intellectual training and followed intellectual careers before entering their particular profession. Politican and intellectual come closest in regimes just established by revolution or by a successful nationalist movement (their quality as intellectuals, however, is usually not particularly distinguished). In established political regimes, although there may be a significant number of politicians who were once intellectuals of a respectable level, over a long period the demands of the profession of politics leave little time, strength, or sensitivity for the continued consumption of intellectual goods.

Among the leading Western countries, it is in the United States that the political elite gives a preponderant impression of indifference toward works of superior culture. The situation is probably not very different in Great Britain, France, Germany or Italy—though there, the political elite, living amidst aristocratic and patrician traditions, possesses an external gloss of intimacy with high culture. In the United States, however, despite Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, the Plutarch-reading Harry Truman, and the *De re metallica*-editing Herbert Hoover, the political elite gives a definitely unintellectual impression.

The same is true of the American plutocracy: as a body of collectors of the works of painting and sculpture and as patrons of learning, it will take an outstanding place in the history of the great Maecenases. Yet the dominant impression is one of indifference and inhospitality to intellectual work. The great industrial system of the United States has required a large corps of engineers and applied scientists, men of great imagination and even high creativity; yet their cultural consumption (not only of superior culture but also of mediocre culture) is rather small. The vigor and pre-eminence of these sectors of the American elite, and the conventions of the media of information through which their public image is formed, fortify intellectuals with the sense that they alone in their society are concerned with superior culture.

Among the middle classes the consumption of the traditional genres of superior culture is not large. Popular periodicals, best-selling novels, political books of transient interest, inferior poetry, inspirational works of theology and moral edification and biog-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

raphies—these made up and still make up the bulk of their consumption. More recently, the films and radio, and most recently, television, have provided the substance of their cultural consumption. Their fare is largely philistine—mediocre culture and brutal culture. Nonetheless, because of exposure to the "mass media," e.g., periodicals like *Life* and a narrow band of the output on television, film, and radio, a larger section of these classes has come into contact with and consumed a larger quantity of extra-religious, superior culture than has been the case throughout the course of modern history.

Finally, the industrial working class and the rural population remain to be considered. Together, these classes consume almost nothing of the inheritance and current production of superior culture. Very little mediocre culture of the conventional genres reaches them except in such periodicals as *Life, Look,* and *The Reader's Digest.* Much of their culture as transmitted by mass media is brutal—crime films and television spectacles, paperbacks of violence, pornographic oral and printed literature, and the culture of the world of sports.

It would be a mistake, however, to think that the culture possessed by these classes is exhausted by what comes to them through the mass media. A large amount of traditional religious culture (and of sectarian variants of traditional religious culture) flourishes in all the nonintellectual classes. Much of regional and class culture, maintained by family, by colleagues, neighbors, and friends and by local institutions, survives and is unlikely to be supplanted by the larger culture which emanates from the center. This places limits on what is incorporated from the current flow of the mass media.*

A special stratum of the population that cuts across all classes and gives a particular tone to mass society is the younger generation, the maligned and bewildering "youth." The coming forth of youth in contemporary society rests on primordial foundations which exist in all societies. In most societies, however, the institutional structure and the niggardliness of nature have kept youth in check. In modern times, romanticism and increased wealth and (more deeply) the expanding radius of empathy and fellow-feeling have given

* Also, it should be added, this persistence of traditional and orally transmitted culture renders fruitless the effort to diagnose the dispositions and outlook of a people by analyzing what is presented to them through films, television, and wireless broadcasts, the press, etc.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

youth opportunities never before available. The enhanced productivity of the economy of Western countries has, on the one hand, allowed young people to remain outside the hard grind of work for a longer time; it has given them opportunities to earn and spend substantial individual incomes. The resulting cultural manifestations are largely responsible for what is called "mass culture."

Before the advent of mass society, a small proportion of the youth were rigorously inculcated with superior culture; the rest were exposed to the brutal culture of their seniors. It is one of the marks of mass society, however, that youth has become a major consumer of the special variants of mediocre and brutal culture that are produced for transmission through the mass media. An extraordinary quantity of popular music, mediocre and brutal films, periodical literature, and forms of dance is produced for and consumed by youth. This is something unprecedented, and this is the heart of the revolution of mass culture.

Most of the "youthful mass" comes from strata of society which have had little connection except through religious education with high or superior culture. Not yet enmeshed in the responsibilities of family and civic life, and with much leisure time and purchasing power, youth constitutes both an eager and a profitable public which attracts the attention of the mass media. The eagerness of youth for the mediocre and brutal culture provided by the mass media, and that youth's own creative poverty are a universal phenomenon. Where the political elite does not grant this eagerness the right of direct expression, but seeks instead to divert it into ideological channels or to dam it up, it still remains powerful and indomitable. Where the political order allows this passionate and uncultivated vitality to find a free expression, the result is what we see throughout the Western world.

The Production of Culture

The High Intelligentsia. A differentiated creative intelligentsia is the oldest stratum of Western society with a set of continuous traditions. Such a stratum still exists today, far broader than ever before, far more extended and with international ties exceeding that of any other section of our own or any other society.* There is

* The internationality of the medieval church and of the European aristocracy in the eighteenth century was thin and parochial in comparison with the scope and intensity of that exhibited by present-day intellectual classes.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

today more internal specialization than in the past: it is impossible for any one man to be fully conversant with the inherited and currently produced stock of cultural objects. The productive intelligentsia is perhaps less intensely like-minded now than in the past, when it was smaller and the body of what it had to master was smaller. Nonetheless, despite changes in society, in the modes of financial support and in the organization of intellectual life, this creative stratum is constantly reproducing and increasing.

The Mediocre Intelligentsia. The modern age, however, has seen growing up alongside this creative intelligentsia a much larger stratum of producers of mediocre culture. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, when letters and the arts began to offer the possibilities of a professional career, thanks to the advance of printing and to an enlarging public, there emerged, besides those whose creative capacities achieved the heights of greatness, a wider group of writers, artists, and scholars. From these were recruited the residents of Grub Street, who, while still trying to reach the highest levels, had to live by producing for a less discriminating public. The nineteenth century saw the stabilization of the profession of those who produced almost exclusively for the public that consumed mediocre culture. The popular press, the film, radio, and television have deepened and extended their ranks. The enlargement of university populations and the corresponding increase in the number of university teachers, the increased opportunities for careers in research, in the applied natural and social sciences, have similarly added to the producers of mediocre culture.*

The professional practitioner with a mediocre culture has developed traditions, models, and standards of his own. More frequently than in the past he engages directly in the professional production of mediocre culture without first essaying the production of works of superior culture. He can attain an excellence within his own field that often brings him satisfaction and esteem. Indeed, in certain genres of mediocre culture that are new or at least relatively

* The increase in numbers of persons in intellectual occupations and those that require intellectual training might well be pressing hard against the supply. The supply of high talent is limited; improved methods of selection and training can somewhat increase it, but they cannot make it limitless or coterminous with the population of any society. Hence as the numbers expand, modern societies are forced to admit many persons whose endowments are such as to permit only a mediocre performance in the creation and reproduction of cultural works.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

new, he can reach heights of unprecedented excellence, to the point where, if the genre is admissible, his work can take on the lineaments of superior cultural achievement.

Yet despite this approximation to autonomy, the autonomy remains incomplete. The producer of mediocre culture is exposed to the standards of superior culture, and he cannot entirely escape their pressure. If he prospers and his colleagues on the level of superior culture do not, then he is guilt-ridden for having "betrayed" higher standards for the sake of the fleshpots.

This troubling juxtaposition of two consciences is rendered more acute by the physical juxtaposition of the two levels of cultural objects and the social contact of their producers in the media through which mediocre culture chiefly finds its audience, namely, the media of mass communication. The professionals of mediocre culture cannot, even if they would, forget the standards of superior culture, because they mix with persons who often attain them, because the media from time to time present works composed according to those standards, and because critics continually refer to them. These factors provide an increasing stimulus to an awareness of and a concern for high standards, even when they are not observed.

The Brutal Intelligentsia. The producers of brutal culture confront a quite different situation. They have neither a similarly compelling historical past nor the connections with superior culture which their "colleagues" in the field of mediocre culture possess. They do not, so far as I know, justify their performance by reference to the great masters of their art. There are some exceptions among crime-story writers, boxers, jockeys, and certainly among a few of the best sports writers. But these are new professions. Their practitioners feel no continuity with their forerunners, even though the objects they produce have been produced for a long time. Brutal culture therefore has only recently developed a differentiated professional personnel.

Brutal culture has not shown great potentialities for development. Nonetheless, certain genres of brutal culture have produced works of great excellence, so that these reach through mediocre culture into the outer confines of superior culture. Some works of pornography have found a place in superior culture, some horror stories have done the same, as have the chronicles of sports. Since brutal culture is by no means restricted to the uncultivated classes for its audience, works of brutal culture, which reach a form of high refinement, also make their way upward, and with them, their

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

producers move in the same direction. In the main, however, there is a wall which separates the producers of brutal culture from the producers of superior culture. Even where they find the same audience, the tradition of superior culture is such as to erect a barrier to a massive interpenetration.*

A few words should be said here about another kind of cultural production: the anonymous production of folk art and literature and linguistic innovation. In their highest manifestations, the production of these arts was probably never very widely spread. They grow on the edge of craftsmanship, of religious worship and of brutal entertainment. Considerable creative talents must have impelled them into existence. Their creators must have been men of genius, working with subterranean traditions that scarcely exist any more, and that had only a small direct connection with the great tradition of superior culture. In so far as they were inspired by craftsmanship, machine production has greatly restricted their emergence; the traditions which sustained them have atrophied.

It is sometimes asserted that the anonymous cultural production of craftsmen and peasants in the Europe of the later Middle Ages and of early modern times has been destroyed by the growth of mass culture. This is possible, but it is not the only possibility. If we assume that the proportion of geniuses and outstandingly gifted intelligences and sensibilities in any population remains fairly constant (not an unreasonable assumption) and that modern Western societies with their increasing cultivation of science, literature, art, enterprise, administration, and technology have been drawing more and more on their reservoirs of talent, then it appears quite plausible to assert that the talents of the type once manifested in the anonymous productions of folk culture have been recruited and diverted into other spheres and are active at different levels of culture and social life.

The Position of Superior Culture in Mass Society

Has the culture created in the past forty years—the approximate age of mass society—deteriorated as much as its detractors claim?

* The bohemian sector of the high intelligentsia, past and present, is an exception to this generalization. The mingling of poets and cut-purses has a long and special history which runs down to the occasional highbrow glorification of the hipster.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The task of assessment is most difficult.

Let us for the moment grant that contemporary refined culture may be poorer than the superior culture produced in any comparable span of years in the past. There may be any number of reasons or causes, totally unrelated to the development and impact of mass society on culture. For example, the distribution and efflorescence of genius are matters that still await full understanding. It is conceivable, if unlikely, that our neural equipment is poorer than that of our ancestors. And even if it is as good, it is also possible that our cultural traditions have passed their point of culmination, that they contain no possibilities of further development, that they offer no point of departure even for creative minds. Another important consideration is whether the alleged deterioration is being evaluated in the light of standards that are applied equally to other periods. We must be sure to comprehend in our assessment the whole range of intellectual and artistic activities. We must remember that the genius which is expressed in refined culture may be of diverse forms, and that it can flow into some domains in one age, and into other domains in other ages.

Yet these might be idle reflections. The evidence of decline is not by any means very impressive. In every field of science and scholarship into which so much of our contemporary genius flows (in physics, chemistry, and in mathematics, in biology and neurology, in logic, linguistics, and anthropology, in comparative religion, in Sinology and Indology), outstanding work is being done, not only in the older centers not yet afflicted by the culture of mass society, but in the United States as well, that most massive of all mass societies. Theology seems to be in a more vital and powerful state than it has been for several centuries. Economics proceeds on a high level, higher on the average than in past periods; sociology, barbarous, rude, and so often trivial, offers at its best something which no past age can match in the way of discovery and penetration. In political philosophy, in which our decay is said to be so patent, we have no Aristotle, Hobbes, or Bentham, but there are probably only a half dozen such masters in all human history. On the other hand, in France and America there are men and women who are at least as deep and rigorous in their analysis of central issues as John Stuart Mill or Walter Bagehot or de Tocqueville were. In the novel, we have no Tolstoy, no Stendhal or Dostoievsky or Flaubert; still, the level of achievement is high. In poetry and in painting, there may indeed have been a falling-off from the great heights; in drama there

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

is no Aeschylus, no Shakespeare, no Racine. But these are among the highest peaks of all human history, and the absence of any such from our two-fifths of a century can scarcely constitute evidence of a general decline in the quality of the products of superior culture in our own time.

That there is, however, a consciousness of decline is undeniable. Intellectuals are beset by a malaise, by a sense of isolation, of disregard, of a lack of sympathy. They feel they have lost contact with their audiences, especially that most important of all audiences, those who rule society. This is nothing new. Romanticism is still far from dead, and it is a cardinal tenet of romanticism that the creative person is cut off from his own society and especially from its rulers. The contemporary romantic intellectual has in addition an acute sense of being cut off from the people.

The noisy, visible, tangible presence of mediocre and brutal culture has heightened his anguish. Whereas intellectuals in earlier ages of modern society could remain ignorant of the cultural preferences of those who consumed cultural objects other than their own, this is not really possible for contemporary intellectuals. By virtue of their own relations to production, the vigor with which mediocre and brutal cultures are promoted, and the evident enjoyment of their consumers, intellectuals are forced to be familiar with what takes place on these levels of culture.

But what are the specific threats to superior culture in mass society? To what extent do they differ from earlier dangers? To what extent do these dangers derive from mass society itself? For superior culture is and has always been in danger. Since it never is and never has been the culture of an entire society, it must necessarily be in a state of tension *vis-à-vis* the rest of society. If the producers and consumers of superior culture see further and deeper than their contemporaries, if they have a more subtle and more lively sensitivity, if they do not accept the received traditions and the acknowledged deities of their fellow countrymen, whatever they say or believe or discover is bound to create tension.

Are intellectuals more endangered in the age of mass society by the jealousy and distrust of the powerful than in other social eras? Surely, censorship, arrest, and exile are nothing new. Can the occasional anti-intellectual flurries of American politicians and businessmen be equated with the restraints imposed on intellectuals in Soviet Russia, Fascist Spain, or National Socialist Germany? None of these countries, it should be noted, are or were mass societies in

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the sense that the contemporary United States is, or as the United Kingdom, Western Germany, and France are becoming. Does the role played by advertising on the television screen represent a greater intrusion into the creative sphere than did the prosecutions of Flaubert and Baudelaire in nineteenth-century France, or the moral censorship which Mrs. Grundy used to exercise so coarsely in the United States and which she still does in Britain, or the political and religious censorship practiced in eighteenth-century France? Athenian society was no mass society, and there were no advertisers there, yet Socrates was executed. I do not wish to belittle the present or recent attacks on intellectual or artistic liberty in the United States, but I do wish to stress that they are not unique to mass society.

It is sometimes asserted that the culture of mass society produces its insidious effects in roundabout ways that constitute a greater danger than the crude external pressures employed by the rulers of earlier societies. It seduces, it is said, rather than constrains. It offers opportunities for large incomes to those who agree to the terms of employment offered by institutions of mediocre and brutal culture. But does this opportunity, and even its acceptance, necessarily damage superior culture? The mere existence of the opportunity will not seduce a man of strongly impelled creative capacities, once he has found his direction. And if he does accept the opportunity, are his creative talents inevitably stunted? Is there no chance at all that they will find expression in the mass medium to which he is drawn? The very fact that here and there in the mass media, on television and in the film, work of superior quality is to be seen, seems to be evidence that genuine talent is not inevitably squandered once it leaves the traditional refined media.

It is, of course, possible for men to waste their talents, to corrupt themselves for the pleasures of office, for the favor of authority, for popularity, or for income or for the simple pleasure of self-destruction. Qualitatively, the financial temptations of work in the media of mass communication are of the same order as the other temptations intellectuals encounter. Quantitatively, it is difficult to estimate the magnitude of the temptation. There are certainly more opportunities now for intellectuals to earn much money in the production of mediocre and brutal cultural objects than there were before the development of the mass media. It is clear, however, that the large majority of literary men, poets, scholars, painters, scientists, or teachers have not been tempted nor have they yielded to the temptation—even if we concede, which we do not, that their experience in

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the mass media prevents them from finding creative expression either in the mass media or outside them.

Popularization is sometimes cited as one of the ways in which superior culture is being eroded. Does the contact between mediocre and refined culture which occurs in popularization do damage to refined culture? Raymond Aron's thought does not deteriorate because he occasionally writes in *The New York Times Magazine* and much more frequently in *Le Figaro*; Bertrand Russell suffers no injury from an article in *Look Magazine*. There is no reason why gifted intellectuals should lose their powers because they write for audiences unable to comprehend their ordinary level of analysis and exposition. An intellectual who devotes all his efforts to popularization would soon cease to have anything of his own to popularize and would have to become a popularizer of the works of other persons. But there is no convincing evidence that persons who are capable of refined cultural production and who are strongly impelled to it are being gradually drawn away from their calling by the temptations of popularization. What has been the loss to American, British, and French science in the past forty years from the development of the new branch of journalism which is involved in scientific popularization?

The production of mediocre or brutal culture need not (so the argument goes) destroy superior culture by striking at its producers, either constrainingly or seductively. It can deprive them of their market, and especially of the discriminating appreciation they need to keep their skills at the highest pitch. The corruption of public taste, of those consumers whose natural discriminative powers are not so great that they can dispense with the cultivation which a refined cultural environment provides, is certainly a possibility. In contrast to this possibility, however, is the fact that in the United States today discrimination in a small minority (certainly no smaller than at the end of the nineteenth century or in England today) is as acutely perceptive as it ever was. The quality of literary criticism in *The Partisan Review*, *The Hudson Review*, *The Sewanee Review*, and *The New Yorker* is as informed, as penetrating, and as reflective as it was fifty years ago in the best American or British periodicals.

The demand for the products of mediocre and brutal culture certainly affects the market for the products of superior culture. If there were no inferior cultural products available and if the purchasing power were there, there certainly would be a larger body of purchasers of the products of superior culture. This was the situa-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tion in Britain during the war, and it is probably the situation in the Soviet Union today. As to whether this represents an improvement in public taste is another matter. In Britain, after the war, once inferior cultural objects became available in larger supply, the prosperity of serious booksellers markedly declined. The same would probably occur in the Soviet Union if a larger range of consumer goods, cultural and other, were to enter the market.

Therefore, when public demand is free to obtain the objects it desires, the market for superior cultural objects, given the present distribution of tastes, is restricted, and enterprisers with capital to invest will not rush in to use their resources in areas of the market where the return is relatively poor. Yet are there many manuscripts of books of outstanding merit lying unpublished today?

The relative unprofitability of the market for superior cultural objects is compensated for in part by the existence of enterprises motivated by other than profit considerations. There is no reason to assume that such uneconomically oriented investors will be fewer in the future than in the recent past. In part, the unprofitability of the market is circumvented by subsidy or patronage.

We often hear the old system of patronage praised by those who bemoan its passing. It is well to remember, however, what misery and humiliation it imposed on its beneficiaries, how capricious and irregular it was, and how few were affected by it during the period from the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries when intellectuals were growing in numbers. Many more were supported by administrative sinecures in church and state.

The private patronage of individual intellectuals by individual patrons still exists, but it plays a scant role. The place of this older form of subsidy has been taken over by the universities, the state, and the private foundations, and they appear to be more lavish, more generous, and more just than their predecessors were in earlier centuries.

There is, however, a major deficiency in the institutional system of high culture in the United States, one that can be largely attributed to the successful competition among the best of the newer organs of mass communication. America lacks a satisfactory intellectual weekly press, and, ironically, this is in part the achievement of *Time Magazine*. *The Nation* and *The New Republic*, which thirty years ago provided something quite comparable in journalistic and intellectual quality to *The Spectator*, have declined in quality and influence.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The absence of a passable intellectual weekly* does damage to American intellectual life. The country is so large and the intellectuals so scattered that a continuous focus on intellectual concerns (including the evaluation of political and economic affairs in a manner acceptable to a sophisticated, intellectual public) would serve invaluably to maintain standards of judgment and to provide a common universe of discourse.† There is a danger in the United States today of a centrifugal force within the intellectual classes, arising from their numbers, their spatial dispersion and their professional specialization. These factors tend to weaken the sense of community among our intellectual classes. Without this sense of community, the attachment to high standards might slacken or even collapse altogether.

Puritanism, Provincialism, and Specialization

If the arguments of those who attribute to mass society the alleged misery of contemporary culture are not sound, there is no gainsaying the fact that the consumption of superior culture does not rest in a perfectly secure position in the United States. The culture of the educated classes, who in America as elsewhere should be its bearers, leaves much to be desired. One is distressed by the boorish and complacent ignorance of university graduates, by the philistine distrust of or superciliousness toward superior culture which is exhibited by university professors in the humanities and social sciences or in the medical and law schools of this country, and by journalists and broadcasters. The political, economic, military, and technological elites are no better. The near illiteracy of some of the better American newspapers, the oftentimes raucous barbarism of our weeklies and our one widely circulated fortnightly, the unlettered-ness of many of our civil servants, the poverty of our bookshops, the vulgarity of our publishers (or at least those who write their jacket blurbs and their advertising copy) can give little comfort.

There is undeniably much that is wrong with the quality of culture consumed by the more or less educated classes in America. Very

* *Commonweal* exists on a higher intellectual plane than that of our two secular weeklies, but its religious preoccupations restrict the generality of its appeal.

† The excellent highbrow reviews are no substitute for an intellectual weekly. They are too infrequent, they are too apolitical, and even where they are not, as in the case of the *Partisan Review* or *Commentary*, they cannot maintain a continuous flow of comment and coverage.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

little of what is wrong, however, can be attributed to the mass media, particularly to the films, television, radio, and popular magazines.

It is not that the cascade of mediocre and brutal culture which pours out over the mass media is admirable. Quite the contrary. The culture of the mass media is not, however, the reason that the distribution and consumption of superior culture disclose (alongside so many profoundly impressive achievements) many things that are repellent.

What is wrong, is wrong with our intellectuals and their institutions and with some of our cultural traditions, which have little to do with the culture created for and presented by the mass media.

The dour Puritanism that looked on aesthetic expression as self-indulgence does not grow out of mass society. Nor does the complacent and often arrogant provincialism that distrusts refined culture because it believes it to be urban, Anglophile, and connected with a patrician upper class. America was not a mass society in the nineteenth century, it was a differentiated society in which pronounced equalitarian sentiments often took on a populistic form. Certain tendencies which have culminated in a mass society were at work in it. However, much of its culture, although mediocre and brutal, was not produced by the institutions or by the professional personnel now producing the culture of mass society.

Refined culture in nineteenth-century America, reflecting the taste of the cultivated classes of New England and the Middle Atlantic States, did not enjoy a hospitable reception in the Middle West, as a result of the usual hostility of province against metropolis and of those who arrived later in America against those who arrived earlier and who became established sooner. American provincial culture in the nineteenth century was a variant of the British provincial dissenting culture that Matthew Arnold criticized unsparingly in *Culture and Anarchy*. Whereas this culture collapsed in England after World War I, in America it has continued powerful almost up to the present.

These are some of the special reasons for the present uncongeniality of superior culture to so many Americans. It springs from a general distrust that superior culture must always encounter in any society. In this country it expresses itself with greater strength, virulence, and freedom because the political and economic elites of American society feel little obligation to assume a veneer of refined culture, as in Great Britain and France.

Against this background of tradition and sentiment, the develop-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ment of education in the United States in the past decades has created a technical intelligentsia that does not form a coherent intellectual community. While secondary education became less intellectual in its content and undergraduate education dissipated itself in courses of study of very low intensity and little discipline, a very superior and vigorous type of postgraduate education developed. In trying to make up for lost ground and in seeking to make a deep and thorough penetration into a rapidly growing body of knowledge, postgraduate training in each discipline has had to become highly specialized.

This impetus toward specialization has been heightened by the natural development of science and by the growth of the percentage of the population that pursues postgraduate studies. The development of science has greatly increased the volume of literature a student must cover in each discipline; the increasing number of students, and the necessity for each to do a piece of research no one has ever done before have tended to narrow the concentration within the discipline imposed by the internal evolution of the subject.*

The product of these educational and scientific developments has been the specialist who is uncultivated outside his own specialty. Except for those strong and expansive personalities whose curiosity and sensitivity lead them to the experience of what their education has failed to give them, even the creative American scientist, scholar, or technologist often possesses only a narrow range of mediocre culture.

The ascent of the universities to preponderance in the life of superior culture in the United States, and increasingly (though still not to the same extent) in Europe, has meant that trends within the university tend to become the trends of intellectual life as a whole to a much greater degree than in earlier periods of modern society. As the universities have become more internally differentiated and specialized, superior cultural life has also tended to become more specialized.

What we are suffering from is the dissolution of "the educated public," coherent although unorganized, with a taste for superior cultural objects with no vocational import. The "universitization" of superior culture—most advanced in America but already visible

* The romantic idea of originality, which claimed that genius must go its own unique way, has been transposed into one that demands that the subject matter should be unique to the investigator. This has led to much specialized triviality in humanistic research.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in Great Britain, too, though not at all a completely realized tendency—is part of this process of the dissolution of the body of consumers of superior culture.

At the same time, it would be disregarding the truth to overlook the extraordinary vitality of the contemporary American university. Vitality by its nature is diffuse and inflammatory. It is possible, therefore, that despite the densely specialized clutter of the post-graduate system and the prevailing pattern of research which is partly a cause and partly a result of that system, this vitality will do more than withstand the pressure; it is possible that it will ignite interest along a broader front than specialized training commands. It is also possible that the waste of undergraduate education will turn into lively cultivation through the vitality of the new generation of college teachers who are at present among the chief consumers and reproducers of superior culture.

Specialization has lessened the coherence of the intellectual community, comprising creators, reproducers and consumers; it has dispersed its focus of attention, and thus left ungratified cultural needs which the mediocre and brutal culture of the mass media and of private life have been called in to satisfy. The consumption of brutal and mediocre culture is the consequence, not the cause, of developments which are quite independent of the specific properties of mass society. As a matter of fact, the vitality, the individuality, which may rehabilitate our intellectual public will probably be the fruits of the liberation of powers and possibilities inherent in mass societies.

The Prospects of Superior Culture in Mass Society

The problems of superior culture in mass society are the same as in any society. These problems are the maintenance of its quality and influence on the rest of the society.

To maintain itself, superior culture must maintain its own traditions and its own internal coherence. The progress of superior culture (and its continued self-renewal and expansion) require that the traditions be sustained, however much they are revised or partially rejected at any time.

Respect for the traditions in one's own field, together with freedom in dealing with those traditions, are the necessary conditions for creative work. The balance between them is difficult to define, and it is no less difficult to discern the conditions under which that balance can be achieved and maintained. Of great importance is the morale (in its broadest sense) of the intellectuals who take on ad-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ministrative and teaching responsibilities for the maintenance and advancement of high culture. Within this section of the intellectual class, there must be an incessant scrutiny of every institutional innovation, with regard to its possible impact on intellectual morale. An essential element in this internal state is a balance between respect and freedom in relation to the immanent traditions of each field of intellectual work.

Serious intellectuals have never been free from pressure on the part of sectors of society other than their own. The intellectual sector has always been relatively isolated, regardless of the role of intellectuals in economic and political life. The external world is always jealous of the devotion of the intellectuals to their own gods, and of the implicit criticism which that devotion directs against the ruling values of the other spheres. Intellectuals have always been faced with the task of continuing their own tradition, developing it, differentiating it, improving it as best they could. They have always had to contend with church, state, and party, with merchants and soldiers who have sought to enlist them in their service and to restrict and damage them in word and deed if they did not yield to temptations and threats. The present situation has much in common with the past. The responsibilities of intellectuals also remain the same: to serve the standards they discern and develop and to find a way of rendering unto Caesar what is Caesar's without renouncing what belongs to their own proper realm.

There is no doubt in my mind that the main "political" tradition by which most of our literary, artistic, and social-science intellectuals have lived in America is unsatisfactory. The fault does not lie exclusively with the intellectuals. The philistine Puritanism and provincialism of our elites share much of the blame, as does the populism of professional and lay politicians. Nonetheless, the intellectuals cannot evade the charge that they have done little to ameliorate the situation. Their own political attitudes have been alienated, they have run off into many directions of frivolity. The most recent of such episodes in the 1930's and 1940's were also the most humiliating, and temporarily the most damaging, to the position of intellectuals in American society.

One of the responsibilities implied by their obligation to maintain good relations with the nonintellectual elite is the "civilization" of political life, i.e., the infusion of the standards and concerns of a serious, intellectually disciplined contemplation of the deeper issues of political life into everyday politics. Our intellectuals have in the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

main lectured politicians, upbraided them, looked down their noses at them, opposed them, and even suspected those of their fellow intellectuals who have become politicians of moral corruption and intellectual betrayal.

The intellectuals who have taken on themselves the fostering of superior culture are part of the elite in any country; but in the United States they have not felt bound by any invisible affiliation with the political, economic, ecclesiastical, military, and technological elites.*

The "civilization" of political life is only one aspect of the "process of civilization," which is the expansion of the culture of the center into the peripheries of society and, in this particular context, the diffusion of superior culture into the areas of society normally consuming mediocre and brutal culture.

Within the limits mentioned earlier in this essay, the prospects for superior culture seem to be reasonably good. The overlapping at certain points on the part of the producers of superior culture and those of mediocre culture has resulted in an expansion of the elements of superior culture which reaches persons whose usual inclinations do not lead them to seek it out. Popularization brings a better content, but not all of this expansion is popularization; much of it is the presentation (and consumption) of genuinely superior cultural work. An improvement in our educational system at the elementary and secondary levels, which is assuredly practicable and likely, will also further this process of civilization. A better education of taste, which a richer, less scarcity-harassed society can afford, the opening and enrichment of sensitivity, which leisure and a diversified environment can make possible, and a more fruitful use of available intelligence can also push forward the "process of civilization."

Of course, men will remain men, their capacities to understand, create, and experience will vary, and very many are probably destined to find pleasure and salvation at other and lower cultural levels. For the others, the prospect of a more dignified and richer cultural life does not seem out of the question. It would certainly be an impossible one, however, if all intellectuals devoted themselves to education and popularization. In a short time the superior culture which would be transmitted through the "process of civilization" would fade and dessicate.

* This is not a condition unique to the United States. Only Great Britain has managed to avoid it for most of the period since the French Revolution, yet there, too, the past few years have not provided notable examples of Britain's good fortune in avoiding this separation.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Thus, if the periphery is not to be polished while the center becomes dusty, the first obligation of the intellectuals is to look after intellectual things, to concentrate their powers on the creation and reproduction and consumption of particular works of philosophy, art, science, literature, or scholarship, to receive the traditions in which these works stand with a discriminating readiness to accept, elaborate, or reject. If that is done, there will be nothing to fear from the movement of culture in mass society.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ERNEST VAN DEN HAAG

A Dissent from the Consensual Society

EDWARD SHILS replaces Van Wyck Brooks' high, middle, and lowbrow classification (lately elaborated fruitfully by Richard Chase[1]) with his own: "refined," "mediocre," and "brutal" culture. The old terminology was unsatisfactory; but the new one is much more so. The evaluative element inherent in both should be formulated independently.[2] It is stronger in the new notation. Further, this notation is misleading in its implications. "Refined" has a genteel connotation, which I find hard to apply to such highbrows as Joyce, Kafka, Dostoyevsky, Céline, or Nathanael West. Nor are lowbrow and "brutal" equivalent; indeed, the belief that they are is a middlebrow cliché, a projection of ambivalent desire and fear that identifies vitality and brutality. Actually, much lowbrow culture is maudlin and sentimental rather than brutal.[3] Even the term "mediocre" culture, though less misleading than the others, is not satisfactory and provides a criterion that would be hard to apply.

In my opinion, emphasis on cultural objects misses the point. A sociologist (and to analyze mass culture is a sociological enterprise) must focus on the function of such objects in people's lives: he must study how they are used; who produces what for whom; why, and with what effects. To be sure, value judgments cannot be avoided, but the qualities of the product become relevant only when related to its social functions. Middlebrow culture objects are not necessarily "mediocre." To be a middlebrow is to *relate* to objects, any objects, in a certain way, to give them a specific function in the context of one's life. A middlebrow might, for example, use a phrase, whatever its origin, as a cliché—i.e., in such a way that it loses its emotional impact and specific concrete meaning and no longer communicates but labels or stereotypes and thus avoids perception and communication. The phrase is not middlebrow (or "mediocre"); he is. Beethoven does not become "mediocre," even though he may be-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

come a favored middlebrow composer and function as part of middlebrow culture. Mozart may "tinkle" for the middlebrow; it is not Mozart but the audience that is mediocre. Indeed, it is characteristic of much middlebrow culture to overuse highbrow cultural objects of the past without understanding them and thus both to honor and debase them. Mr. Shils's terminology precludes the description of cultural dynamics in these terms and thus disregards one of the most important aspects of mass culture: the corruption and sterilization of the heritage of the past.

Mass culture is not the culture of a class or group throughout history. It is the culture of nearly everybody today, and of nearly nobody yesterday; and because of production, market, and social changes, it is quite a new phenomenon which cannot be reduced to quantitative changes nor identified with timeless categories. Mr. Shils dismisses the conditions under which mass culture is produced and consumed with some descriptive phrases but does not relate mass production to the qualities of the cultural objects he discusses. His categories remain ahistorical, even though garnished with familiar historical references. Thus, the problem of mass culture is defined away, instead of being analyzed.

Mr. Shils hopefully maintains that "refined" culture now has become available to more people than ever before. This is true, but it constitutes the problem—not the solution. What are people making of the cultural heritage that is becoming available to them? What impact does it have on them? What are they doing to it? Mass culture involves a change in the conditions in which objects are produced, consumed, and related to on all levels, a change in the role each level plays, and a change finally in the way people relate to each other. At times Mr. Shils seems to recognize this change; but his categories preclude analysis of it. The destruction of folk culture by mass culture is apparently denied and then explained by the hypothesis that the proportion of gifted people remains "fairly constant" in any population and that they are now "diverted into other spheres." This is, of course, what is meant by the destruction of folk culture, in addition to other effects of increased mobility and communication. It is remarkable that Shils also says that, if high culture has declined (which he denies) possibly "our neural equipment is poorer than that of our ancestors." Neither of the two inconsistent hypotheses—unchanged or changed "neural equipment"—can be proved. Does this mean that we can use both? Since we know so little about neurological change, would it not be sensible to look for social changes to explain cultural

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

changes? Mr. Shils recognizes social changes but refuses to relate them to cultural changes, which he denies, asserts, deplores, and approves. He cannot be wrong since he has left all possibilities open.

Mr. Shils suggests that anyone critical of mass culture must be a *laudator temporis acti;* I see no basis for this, nor for his own temporal chauvinism. We have no measurements; and history is not a homogeneous stream; hence, comparisons with the past depend largely on the period selected as standard. Comparison of specific aspects and levels of culture may be instructive or, at least, illustrative; but wholesale judgments seem futile.[4]

The crucial issue is fully comprised in the question with which Rostovtzeff concludes his *magnum opus*: "Is it possible to extend a higher civilization to the lower classes without debasing its standard and diluting its quality to the vanishing point? Is not every civilization bound to decay as soon as it begins to penetrate the masses?"

Mr. Shils describes mass society as one in which there is "more sense of attachment to society as a whole . . . more sense of affinity with one's fellows." According to him, the mass stands in a closer relationship to the center; there is a "dispersion of charisma" with "greater stress on individual dignity"; "the value of sensation has come to be widely appreciated"; individuality has been "discovered and developed," as has the value of personal relationships; the masses begin to "become capable of more subtle perception and judgment" as their "moral responsiveness and sensibility are aroused."

The society which Mr. Shils describes is not the one in which I live. I am forced to conjecture that the generosity of his wishes has relaxed the customary strictness of his methods and blunted the accuracy of his perception.[5]

Progress toward the fulfillment of Mr. Shils's wishes is implied by the terms he uses. Yet there are some material doubts. Is the value of sensation more widely appreciated than it was in antiquity, the Renaissance, or even the nineteenth century? I find American society singularly antisensual: let me just mention the food served in restaurants, preprandial cocktails intended, often charitably, to kill sensation. The congested seating arrangements in restaurants, the way cities, suburbs, exurbs, and resorts are built do not support the hypothesis of increased value placed on privacy. Even sex is largely socialized and de-sensualized. Do we stand in closer relationship to the center—or are we alienated, suffering from what Wordsworth described as "perpetual emptiness, unceasing change" because in Yeats'

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

words, "Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold"? Has there actually been a "dispersion of charisma"?[6] Or has there been a shift from real to Hollywood queens? Does our society foster "personal relationships," "individuality," "privacy," or marketability, outer-directedness, pseudo-personalizations parasitically devouring the genuine personalities of those who assume them? Could Jesus go into the desert today to contemplate? Wouldn't he be followed by a crew of *Life* photographers, cameramen, publishers' agents, etc.? What of the gossip columns, of people's interest in other people's private lives and particularly their personal relations—don't these phenomena suggest a breakdown of reserve, vicarious living—indeed, pseudo-life and experience?

Statistical data reveal that there is now higher income, more education, and more equally distributed leisure, increased mobility, travel, and communication. Undoubtedly there is more material opportunity for more people than ever before. But if so many people are so much better off in so many respects, is culture better than ever? The lowered barriers, the greater wealth, the increased opportunities are material achievements but only cultural promises. Mr. Shils appears to have taken all the promises of the age and confused them with fulfillments. It is as though one were to take the data of the Kinsey report and conclude that since there seems to be so much intercourse, people must love each other more than ever. I have nothing against Mr. Kinsey's entomological enterprise (though it makes me feel waspish). But even though it may furnish raw data, we must distinguish it from sociological enterprise.

If people address each other on a first-name basis when they meet, do they really love and esteem each other more than people who do not use first names? Or does equal familiarity with all suggest a lack of differentiation, the very opposite of personal relations, which are based on discriminating among perceived individualities? "In America," de Tocqueville wrote, "the bond of affection is extended but it is relaxed." Mr. Shils notes the extension but not the dilution. Yet extension can only be bought at the price of lessened intensity, depth, and stability.

Of course we have more communication and mobility than ever before. But isn't it possible that less is communicated? We have all the opportunities in the world to see, hear, and read more than ever before. Is there any independent indication to show that we experience and understand more? Does not the constant slick assault on our senses and minds produce monotony and indifference and prevent ex-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

perience? Does not the discontinuity of most people's lives unsettle, and sometimes undo them? We surely have more external contacts than ever before. But most people have less spontaneous and personal (internalized) relationships than they might with fewer contacts and opportunities.

We have more equality of opportunity. But the burden of relative deprivations is felt more acutely the smaller they are and the greater the opportunities.[7] People become resentful and clamor for a different kind of equality, equality at the end rather than the beginning, in short, invidious leveling. Does not the comminution of society alienate people from one another—as the discontinuity of their existence fragments them—and replace a sense of purpose with a sense of meaninglessness? Is the increased "conviviality" Mr. Shils hails more than the wish for "togetherness" which marks the lonely crowd?

Mr. Shils contends that we have more intellectuals, consumers, and producers of "refined" culture than before. In one sense, he is quite right. But these are intellectuals by position (university teachers, authors, etc.), and having more of them tells us nothing about the number of intellectuals by ability, interest, and cultivation. Mr. Shils almost concedes as much. But he remains on the phenomenal level, and never goes to the root of the phenomenon:[8] the marginal role, the interstitial life, of intellectuals in a mass culture society. And I mean those who remain engaged in intellectual life and do not allow themselves to be reduced to the status of technicians or manufacturers of middlebrow entertainments.

Similarly, Mr. Shils mentions the possibility that intellectual and artistic creators may be seduced into more remunerative pseudo-creative activities only to dismiss it by pointing out that "the mere existence of opportunity will not seduce a man of strongly impelled creative capacities once he has found his direction." Of course, no one is impelled *only* by "creative capacities." The trouble is that the lure of mass media (and of foundation money and prestige) and the values that go with them are internalized long before the potential creator "has found his direction."

Mr. Shils declares that "the heart of the revolution of mass culture" is "the expanding radius of empathy and fellow feeling" which "have given to youth opportunities never available before." These opportunities, Mr. Shils concedes, are utilized mainly through "mediocre and brutal culture." But he does not point out (though noting the effect) that the appalling ignorance of educated youth is produced by reliance on the equally ignorant charisma-endowed peer group; by

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

belief, in short, that there is little to learn from the past and its representatives. The loss of respect for learning and tradition, particularly in its less tangible aspects, is not independent of the leveling dear to Mr. Shils; it is not unrelated to the widely held view that obsolescence automatically overtakes aesthetic and moral values, as it does technological invention. It should be evident that this notion is generated by the pragmatic nature of mass culture and by the high mobility that Mr. Shils extolls.[9]

To object to some of Mr. Shils's views is to agree with others. For he starts by praising and ends by deploring mass culture. This nice balance is achieved, I feel, at the expense of a coherent theory of mass culture. Let me suggest a few prolegomena to such a theory.

The most general characteristics of mass culture are deducible from premises on which there is no disagreement: they are concomitants of any industrial, mass production society. Included among these are increased income and mobility, more equally distributed leisure, egalitarianism, wider communication and education,[10] more specialization and less scope for individuality in work. The consequences that I deduce from these premises are consistent and fit my impressions. But there is no strict empirical proof, although I do believe it may be possible to test some of these hypotheses after appropriate reformulation. Further, other hypotheses may be consistent with these premises, and the real question turns on their relative importance and their relevance. With these qualifications, I submit that this quasi-deductive method which relates the ascertainable to the less tangible is the only one that can yield a "theory" of mass culture deserving the name.

Let me outline some of the most important characteristics of mass culture.[11]

(1) There is a separation of the manufacturers of culture from the consumers, which is part of the general separation of production and consumption and of work and play. Culture becomes largely a spectator sport, and life and experience become exogenous and largely vicarious. (Nothing will dissuade me from seeing a difference between a young girl walking around with her pocket radio listening to popular songs and one who sings herself; nor am I persuaded that the tales collected by the brothers Grimm remain the same when enacted on television or synthetically reproduced by Walt Disney.)

(2) Mass production aims at pleasing an average of tastes and therefore, though catering to all to some extent, it cannot satisfy

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

any taste fully. Standardization is required and necessarily de-individualizes—as do the techniques required by mass production and marketing.

(3) Since culture, like everything else in a mass society, is mainly produced to please an average of consumer tastes, the producers become (and remain) an elite by catering to consumer tastes rather than developing or cultivating autonomous ones. Initiative, and power to bestow prestige and income, have shifted from the elite to the mass. The difference may be seen by comparing the development of ritual dogmatic beliefs and practices in the Protestant denominations and in the Roman Catholic church. The latter has minimized, the former maximized dependence on consumers. In the Protestant churches, there is, therefore, no body of religious (as distinguished from moral) beliefs left, except as an intellectual curiosity.

(4) The mass of men dislikes and always has disliked learning and art. It wishes to be distracted from life rather than to have it revealed; to be comforted by traditional (possibly happy and sentimental) tropes, rather than be upset by new ones. It is true that it wishes to be thrilled, too. But irrational violence or vulgarity provides thrills, as well as release, just as sentimentality provides escape. What is new here is that, apart from the fact that irrelevant thrills and emotions are now prefabricated, the elite is no longer protected from the demands of the mass consumers.

(5) As a result of the high psychological and economic costs of individuality and privacy, gregariousness has become internalized. People fear solitude and unpopularity; popular approval becomes the only moral and aesthetic standard most people recognize. This tendency is reinforced by the shrinkage in the importance and size of primary groups, which have also become looser; by a corresponding increase in the size and importance of secondary groups and publics; and finally, by the shift of many of the functions of primary to secondary groups.

(6) The greatly increased lure of mass markets for both producers and consumers diverts potential talent from the creation of art. (Within the arts, the performing do better than the creative ones.) Here interesting empirical questions arise: to what extent is talent bent endogenously and exogenously; to what extent can it be?

(7) Excessive communication serves to isolate people from one another, from themselves, and from experience. It extends bonds by weakening them. People become indifferent and indiscriminately

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tolerant; their own life as well as everything else is trivialized, eclectic, and styleless.

(8) Mass media for inherent reasons must conform to prevailing average canons of taste.[12] They cannot foster art; indeed, they replace it. When they take up classics, they usually reshape them to meet expectations. But even when that is not the case, they cannot hope to individualize and refine taste, though they may occasionally supply an already formed taste for high culture. Half a loaf, in these matters, spoils the appetite, even with vitamins added, and is not better than none. The technical availability of good reproductions and the paperback editions of noncondensed books are unlikely to change this situation; they often add alien elements which merely decorate lives styled by mass culture.[13]

(9) The total effect of mass culture is to distract people from lives which are so boring that they generate obsession with escape. Yet because mass culture creates addiction to prefabricated experience, most people are deprived of the remaining possibilities of autonomous growth and enrichment, and their lives become ever more boring and unfulfilled.

This very brief sketch of the general features of mass culture should make it clear that I do not agree with those mass culture optimists who favor the wide presentation of "refined" culture through the mass media. I do not think this desirable or desired. Nor, for that matter, practicable. People get what they wish and I see no way of imposing on them anything else. I have to disagree with those who appear to think that the issue is to improve the culture offered the mass of men and to try to reach the masses in greater and greater numbers. My conclusion is different: high or refined culture, in my opinion, is best preserved and developed by avoiding mass media. I should go further and give up some advantages of mass production for the sake of greater individualization. This would reverse many present policies. For instance, I should favor fairly high direct taxes on most mass media, or a tax on advertising. Perhaps we might still be capable of replacing the noise that would be thus eliminated with conversation.

REFERENCES

1 Richard Chase, *The Democratic Vista*, Garden City: Doubleday, 1958.

2 Unless it is contended that everything (and everybody) "refined" is morally and aesthetically superior to everything (and everybody) "brutal" or "mediocre," etc. Yet the possibility of excellence *sui generis* must not be excluded

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

by definition—unless, instead of social and cultural, purely aesthetic categories are to be discussed. On this score—and in the whole taxonomic scheme —Mr. Shils is confusing.

3 See *True Romances*, various soap operas, and lowbrow religious and familial piety. "Kitsch," which is part of low and of middle-lowbrow culture, means corny sentimentalization and, contrary to Mr. Shils, it does not "represent aesthetic sensibility and aesthetic aspiration, untutored . . ." but a synthetic, an *Ersatz* for both. Paper flowers, however real they look, will never grow.

4 Elsewhere Mr. Shils has suggested that critics of mass culture are sour ex-Marxists. Possibly. Ex-Marxists are likely to be critical minds. That is what made them first Marxists and then ex. But though ex-Marxists may incline to be critics of mass culture (and only some, by no means all), the converse certainly does not follow. At any rate, I am tempted to paraphrase advice attributed to Lincoln: abstemious sociologists might benefit by a draught of radical ex-Marxism.

5 John Stuart Mill (*On Liberty*, ch. 3) concludes his discussion of the power of public opinion in egalitarian societies by pointing out that as leveling proceeds, "there ceases to be any social support for nonconformity . . . any substantive power in society which . . . is interested in taking under its protection opinions and tendencies at variance with those of the public." From de Tocqueville to David Riesman, the dangers of "cultural democracy" have been considered. I do not believe that Mr. Shils comes seriously to grips with these dangers.

6 I am not convinced even that the greater inclusiveness of our society can quite be taken for granted. The fate of the Jews in Germany cannot be that easily dismissed. Nazism was political Kitsch as well as a rise of "brutal culture."

7 "The more complete this uniformity the more insupportable the sight of such a difference becomes," de Tocqueville notes.

8 Even on that level, one might quarrel with Mr. Shils. England is not yet as much imbued with mass culture as we are. The class system and selective education have not been entirely overcome; nor have the traditions of elite culture. With only a quarter of our population—not to speak of wealth—England publishes more books every year than we do. And it has at least as many economists, philosophers, and novelists of the first rank as we do.

9 The phenomenon is part of mass culture everywhere, but the ignorance and rejection of the past were particularly fostered in America because of the immigrant background of many parents, the melting-pot nature of the school system, and the rapid rate of change which makes the experience of the old seem old-fashioned and diminishes their authority.

10 Note that more has to be learned through formal instruction, partly because less culture is transmitted informally and individually. This is no advantage because our school system helps bring about the spread of a homogenized mass culture intentionally and unintentionally.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

11 For a fuller exposition of my views, see Ralph Ross and Ernest van den Haag, *The Fabric of Society* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1957), ch. 15.

12 In Frank Stanton's words, "Any mass medium will always have to cater to the middle grounds . . . the most widely held, or cease to be."

13 Joseph Bram has called my attention to the several distinct phases of mass culture. It often begins with a rather moving attempt of the uneducated to become seriously educated. One sees this in countries beginning their industrial development. The adulteration of, and disrespect for, education comes with full industrialization, when the mass culture market is created and supplied with goods manufactured for it.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

OSCAR HANDLIN

Comments on Mass and Popular Culture

THE QUESTION of the uses of culture, raised in this discussion, offers a strategic point for analysis of the differences between those forms of expression communicated by the mass media and all other popular varieties of art. For, although no society has been devoid of culture, that which we now associate with the mass media appears to be unique in its relationship to the way of life of the people. A brief consideration of the function of culture will illuminate the character of that uniqueness.

Until the appearance of those phenomena which we now associate with the mass media, culture was always considered incidental to some social end. Men did not build architecture or compose music in the abstract. They constructed churches in which to worship or homes in which to live. They composed masses and cantatas as parts of a sacred service. The forms within which they built or composed were important in themselves, but they were also intimately related to the functions they served for those who used them.

Hence the significance of Miss Arendt's suggestive statement which pointed out that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in Europe, culture acquired another kind of utility: that is, it became a means by which the bourgeoisie sought to identify itself with aristocratic society. I would add that an analogous development occurred in the United States in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, complicated by the fact that here the aristocracy was putative only and had to improvise its own standards. The difficulty of doing so brought the whole process to the surface and as a result it was much more open and visible in America than in Europe.

In any case, by 1900 almost everywhere in the Western world the term culture had acquired a distinctive connotation, just as the term Society had. Society no longer referred to the total order of the popu-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lace in a community, but only to a small self-defined segment of it. And culture no longer referred to the total complex of forms through which the community satisfied its wants, but only to certain narrowly defined modes of expression distinguished largely by their lack of practicality.

In the process of redefinition, culture lost all connection with function other than that of establishing an identification with that narrow society which had made itself the custodian of the values attached to the arts. The châteaux of Fifth Avenue were not erected to meet men's needs for homes, any more than the rare books of the tycoons were assembled to satisfy their desire for reading matter. Architecture, literature, art, and music, as defined by society and its intermediaries, became, rather, primarily the symbols of status.

That very fact, indeed, served Society as the justification of its aristocratic pretensions. "Changes in manners and customs," an influential manual explained, "no matter under what form of government, usually originate with the wealthy or aristocratic minority, and are thence transmitted to the other classes. . . . This rule naturally holds good of house-planning, and it is for this reason that the origin of modern house-planning should be sought rather in the prince's mezzanine than in the small middle-class dwelling."*

By the end of the nineteenth century, therefore, Americans could readily identify a miscellaneous congeries of artistic forms as their culture. The citizens of the Republic and foreign observers had no difficulty in recognizing what was American music, literature, or painting, for an elaborate apparatus of critical institutions—museums, orchestras, journals, and universities—existed to pass judgment on what belonged and what did not. These institutions and the impresarios who controlled them had the confidence and support of Society, that segment of the community which assumed that wealth or birth gave it leadership.

Outside the realm of the official culture as defined by Society there persisted other, but excluded, modes of action and expression. The peasants of Europe, the workers of the industrial cities, the ethnic enclaves of the United States did not share the forms of behavior, the tastes and attitudes of the would-be or genuine aristocracy, although they often acknowledged the primacy of the groups above them. But peasants, laborers, and foreigners did retain and employ in their own

* Edith Wharton and Ogden Codman, Jr., *The Decoration of Houses* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1897), p. 5.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lives a complex of meaningful forms of expression of their own. At the time these were commonly characterized as popular or folk culture. Thus in the early decades of this century, it was usual to refer to popular music, popular literature, and popular art, set off and distinct from *the* music, *the* literature, and *the* art of Society.

That designation was misleading, in so far as it carried the implication that popular culture was as coherent and uniform as the official culture. In actuality, popular culture, in America at least, was composed of a complex of sub-cultures. The mass of the population of the metropolitan cities, the Negroes, the farmers of the Great Plains, and other groups which together constituted the bulk of the American population had no taste for the music played by the Philharmonic or the novels approved by Thomas Bailey Aldrich or the paintings certified by Duveen. These people sang and danced, they read, and they were amused or edified by pictures. Only, what they sang or read or looked at was not music or literature or art in the sense defined by Society, and therefore was explained away by the general designation, popular.

Superficially, popular culture differed from the defined culture in the lack of an accepted set of canons or of a normative body of classics. A vaudeville song or a piece of embroidery or a dime novel was accepted or rejected by its audience without comparison with or reference to standards extraneous to itself. But this surface difference sprang from a deeper one. Popular, unlike defined, culture retained a functional quality in the sense that it was closely related to the felt needs and familiar modes of expression of the people it served. Popular songs were to be danced to, vaudeville to be laughed at, and embroidery to be worn or to cover a table.

The development of mass culture—or more properly speaking of the culture communicated through the mass media—has had a disturbing effect upon both popular and defined cultures. The consequences for the latter are the easier to distinguish, for it left not only vestiges but a record of its past which makes possible ready comparisons with the present.

It is far more difficult to make similar comparisons in the case of popular culture. Precisely because it lacked a canon, it also lacked a history. It was not only displaced by later forms; its very memory was all but obliterated. As a result we know very little about the culture that until recently served the people who now consume the products of the mass media. And that gap in our information has

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

given rise to the misconception that the "mass culture" of the present is but an extension of the popular culture of the past.

Yet if that popular culture did not produce its own record, it can be pieced together from fragmentary historical materials which reveal that the mass media have had as deep an impact upon popular as upon official culture. The Ed Sullivan show is not vaudeville in another guise any more than "Omnibus" is a modernized Chautauqua. Television, the movies, and the mass-circulation magazines stand altogether apart from the older vehicles of both popular and defined culture.

An examination of the popular theater, of vaudeville, of the popular newspapers, especially in the Sunday supplements, and of the popular literature of the 1890's reveals four significant elements in the difference between the popular culture of that period and that communicated by the mass media of the present.

In the first place, popular culture, although unstructured and chaotic, dealt directly with the concrete world intensely familiar to its audience. There was no self-conscious realism in this preoccupation with the incidents and objects of the everyday world. Rather, this was the most accessible means of communication with a public that was innocent in its approach to culture, that is, one that looked or listened without ulterior motive or intent.

In the second place, and for similar reasons, popular culture had a continuing relevance to the situation of the audience that was exposed to it. That relevance was maintained by a direct rapport between those who created and those who consumed this culture. The very character of the popular theater, for instance, in which the spontaneous and the "ad lib" were tolerated, encouraged a continuous and highly intimate response across the footlights. So too, the journalism of the American ethnic sub-groups maintained an immediate awareness of the needs and problems of their readers. In general, furthermore, in all media, the writers and actors sprang from the identical milieu as their audience did, and maintained a firm sense of identification with it.

In the third place, popular culture was closely tied to the traditions of those who consumed it. A large part of it was ethnic in character, that is, arranged within the terms of a language and of habits and attitudes imported from Europe. But even that part of it which was native American and which reached back into the early nineteenth and eighteenth centuries, maintained a high degree of continuity with its own past.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Finally, popular culture had the capacity for arousing in its audience such sentiments as wonder and awe, and for expressing the sense of irony of their own situation which lent it enormous emotional power. Men and women shed real tears or rocked with laughter in the playhouses of the Bowery, as they could not in the opera or the theater uptown. The acrobats and the animals of the circus evoked wonder as the framed pictures of the museum could not. The difference was the product of the authenticity of the one type of culture and the artificiality of the other.

Out of American popular culture there emerged occasional bursts of creativity of high level. Instances may be found in the work of Charlie Chaplin, in some of the jazz music of the decade after 1900, and in that strain of literary realism developed by novelists and dramatists whose experience in journalism had brought them into direct contact with popular culture.

In total perspective, however, popular culture was not justified by such by-products so much as by the function it served. Millions of people found in this culture a means of communication among themselves and the answers to certain significant questions that they were asking about the world around them. Indeed, it was the perception of this function that attracted the avant-garde in the opening decades of the twentieth century. Those creative spirits, repelled by the inert pretensions of official culture, often found refreshing elements of authenticity in the popular culture of their times. Bohemia, too, was a kind of ghetto in which the artist, equally with the Italian or Negro laborer, was alien, cut off from respectable society. In fact some of the Bohemians were inclined to idealize popular culture in revulsion against the inability of the official culture to satisfy their own needs.

In the light of these considerations, it is possible to begin to assess the effects of the mass media on the character of popular culture. To some extent the impact of the new media is simply a product of their size. The enormous growth of these media has been of such an order as to involve immediate qualitative changes. The transformation of an audience, once numbered in the thousands, to one of millions profoundly altered all the relationships involved. More specifically, the impact of the mass media has altered the earlier forms of control; it has deprived the material communicated of much of its relevance; and it has opened a gulf between the artist and the audience.

A good deal of the familiar talk about the degree to which advertisers or bankers or interest groups control the mass media is irrele-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

vant. There has been a genuine change in the character of the control of these media as contrasted with the situation of fifty or sixty years ago. But it has taken a more subtle form than is usually ascribed to it.

What is most characteristic of the mass media today is precisely the disappearance of the forms of control that existed in the popular culture of a half-century ago. No one can decide now (as Hearst or Pulitzer could in 1900) to use a newspaper as a personal organ. Nor could any TV or movie executive, advertiser, agent, or even a large sector of the audience dictate the content of what is transmitted through these media. The most they can do is prevent the inclusion of material distasteful to them.

The only accurate way of describing the situation of the mass media is to say they operate within a series of largely negative restraints. There are many things they cannot do. But within the boundaries of what they may do, there is an aimless quality, with no one in a position to establish a positive direction. In part this aimlessness is the product of the failure to establish coherent lines of internal organization; in part it flows from the frightening massiveness of the media themselves; but in part also it emanates from a lack of clarity as to the purposes they serve.

The inability to exercise positive control and the concomitant inability to locate responsibility heighten the general sense of irrelevance of the contents of the mass media. It would, in any case, be difficult for a writer or performer to be sensitive to the character of an unseen audience. But the problems are magnified when the audience is numbered in the millions, in other words, when it is so large that all the peculiarities of tastes and attitudes within it must be canceled out so that all that remains is an abstract least common denominator. And those problems become insoluble when no one has the power or the obligation to deal with them.

In the world of actuality, Americans are factory workers or farmers, Jews or Baptists, of German or Irish descent, old or young; they live in small towns or great cities, in the North or the South. But the medium which attempts to speak to all of them is compelled to discount these affiliations and pretend that the variety of tastes, values, and habits related to them do not exist. It can therefore only address itself to the empty outline of the residual American. What it has to say, therefore, is doomed to irrelevance in the lives of its audience; and the feedback from the consciousness of that irrelevance, without

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

effective countermeasures, dooms the performer and writer to sterility.

The critics of the mass media are in error when they condemn its products out of hand. These media can tolerate good as well as bad contents, high as well as low art. Euripides and Shakespeare can perfectly well follow the Western or quiz show on TV, and the slick magazine can easily sandwich in cathedrals and madonnas among the pictures of athletes and movie queens.

What is significant, however, is that it does not matter. The mass media find space for politics and sports, for science and fiction, for art and music, all presented on an identical plateau of irrelevance. And the audience which receives this complex variety of wares accepts them passively as an undifferentiated but recognizable series of good things among which it has little capacity for choice, and with which it cannot establish any meaningful, direct relationship.

The way in which the contents of the mass media are communicated deprives the audience of any degree of selectivity, for those contents are marketed as any other commodities are. In our society it seems possible through the use of the proper marketing device to sell anybody anything, so that what is sold has very little relevance to the character of either the buyers or of the article sold. This is as true of culture as of refrigerators or fur coats. The contents of the magazine or the TV schedule or the newspaper have as little to do with their sales potential as the engine specifications with the marketability of an automobile. The popularity of quiz shows no more reflects the desires of the audience than the increase in circulation of *American Heritage* or *Gourmet* reflects a growing knowledge of American history or the development of gastronomic taste, or, for that matter, than the efflorescence of tail fins in 1957 reflected a yearning for them on the part of automobile buyers. All these were rather examples of excellent selling jobs.

The mass media have also diluted, if they have not altogether destroyed, the rapport that formerly existed between the creators of popular culture and its consumers. In this respect, the television playlet or variety performance is far different from the vaudeville turn, which is its lineal antecedent. The performer can no longer sense the mood of his audience and is, in any case, bound by the rigidity of his impersonal medium. The detachment in which he and they operate makes communication between them hazy and fragmentary. As a result, the culture communicated by the mass media

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cannot serve the function in the lives of those who consume it that the popular culture of the past did.

Yet the latter was no more able to withstand the impact of the mass media than was official culture. The loose, chaotic organization of popular culture, its appeal to limited audiences, its ties to an ethnic past attenuated with the passage of time, all prevented it from competing successfully against the superior resources of the mass media. Much of it was simply swallowed up in the new forms. What survived existed in isolated enclaves, without the old vitality.

The most important consequences of this change were the destruction of those older functional forms of popular culture, the separation of the audience from those who sought to communicate with it, and the paradoxical diminution of the effectiveness of communication with the improvement of the techniques for communication. Thus far the result has been a diffusion among the audience of a sense of apathy. The intense involvement of the masses with their culture at the turn of the century has given way to passive acquiescence. Concomitantly, the occasional creative artist who wishes to communicate with this audience has lost the means of doing so. At best his work will be received as one of the succession of curious or interesting images that flicker by without leaving an enduring impression upon anyone's consciousness.

Thus there is passing a great opportunity for communication between those who have something to say and the audiences who no longer know whether they would like to listen to what there is to be said.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

LEO ROSTEN

The Intellectual and the Mass Media: Some Rigorously Random Remarks

MOST INTELLECTUALS do not understand the inherent nature of the mass media. They do not understand the process by which a newspaper or magazine, movie or television show is created. They project their own tastes, yearnings, and values upon the masses—who do not, unfortunately, share them. They attribute over-simplified motivations to those who own or operate the mass media. They assume that changes in ownership or control would necessarily improve the product. They presume the existence of a vast reservoir of talent, competence, and material which does not in fact exist.

A great deal of what appears in the mass media is dreadful tripe and treacle; inane in content, banal in style, muddy in reasoning, mawkish in sentiment, vulgar, näive, and offensive to men of learning or refinement. I am both depressed and distressed by the bombardment of our eyes, our ears, and our brains by meretricious material designed for a populace whose paramount preferences involve the narcotic pursuit of "fun."

Why is this so? Are the media operated by cynical men motivated solely by profit? Are they controlled by debasers of culture—by ignorant, vulgar, irresponsible men?

Many intellectuals think so and say so. They think so and say so in the face of evidence they either do not examine or cannot bring themselves to accept: that when the public is free to choose among various products, it chooses—again and again and again—the frivolous as against the serious, "escape" as against reality, the lurid as against the tragic, the trivial as against the serious, fiction as against fact, the diverting as against the significant. To conclude otherwise is to deny the data: circulation figures for the press, box-office receipts

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

for the movies and the theater, audience measurement for radio and television programs.

The sad truth seems to be this: that relatively few people in any society, not excluding Periclean Athens, have reasonably good taste or care deeply about ideas. Fewer still seem equipped—by temperament and capacity, rather than education—to handle ideas with both skill and pleasure.

The deficiencies of mass media are a function, in part at least, of the deficiencies of the masses. Is it unfair to ask that responsibility for mental laziness and deplorable taste be distributed—to include the schools, the churches, the parents, the social institutions which produce those masses who persist in preferring pin-ball games to anything remotely resembling philosophy?

Intellectuals seem unable to reconcile themselves to the fact that their hunger for more news, better plays, more serious debate, deeper involvement in ideas is not a hunger characteristic of many. They cannot believe that the subjects dear to their hearts bore or repel or overtax the capacities of their fellow citizens. Why this is so I shall try to explore later. At this point, let me remark that the intellectual, who examines his society with unyielding and antiseptic detachment, must liberate himself from the myths (or, in Plato's term, the royal lies) by which any social system operates. It is ironic that intellectuals often destroy old myths to erect and reverence special myths of their own. A striking example is found in the clichés with which they both characterize and indict the mass media. Let us consider the principal particulars in that indictment.*

"The mass media lack originality."

They certainly do. Most of what appears in print, or on film, or on the air, lacks originality. But is there any area of human endeavor of which this is not true? Is not the original as rare in science or philosophy or painting as it is in magazines? Is not the original "original" precisely because it is rare? Is it not self-evident that the more that is produced of anything, the smaller the proportion of originality is likely to be? But is the absolute number of novel creative products thereby reduced? Are we dealing with Gresham's Law—or with imperfect observation?

* For the best general summary, and critical comment, see Chapter XV in *The Fabric of Society*, by Ralph Ross and Ernest van den Haag (Harcourt, Brace & Co., 1957), a work of remarkable lucidity and good sense.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The mass media are not characterized by endless inventiveness and variation. But they are considerably more varied and inventive, given their built-in limitations, than we give them credit for. Consider these limitations: neither life nor truth nor fiction offers infinite choices: there is only a limited number of plots or stories or themes; there is only a limited number of ways of communicating the limited body of material; audiences develop a cumulative awareness of resemblances and an augmented resistance to the stylized and the predictable; and even the freshest departures from routine soon become familiar and routine. Besides, originality is often achieved at the price of "balance" or proportion: the most arresting features in, say, *The New Yorker* or *Time* often incur the displeasure of scholars precisely because they prefer vitality to a judicious ordering of "all the facts."

The artist, of course, wrests freshness and new insight from the most familiar material; but true artists, in any field at any given time, are so rare that their singularity requires a special word—"genius."

The mass media are cursed by four deadly requirements: a gargantuan amount of space (in magazines and newspapers) and time (in television and radio) *has* to be filled; talent—on every level, in every technique—is scarce; the public votes, i.e., is free to decide what it prefers (and it is the deplorable results of this voting that intellectuals might spend more time confronting); and a magazine, paper, television or radio program is committed to periodic and unalterable publication. Content would be markedly improved if publications or programs appeared only when superior material was available. This applies to academic journals no less than to publications or programs with massive audiences.

"The mass media do not use the best brains or freshest talents."

Surely the burden of proof is on those who make this assertion. The evidence is quite clear that talent in the popular arts is searched for and courted in ways that do not apply in other fields: seniority is ignored, tenure is virtually nonexistent, youth is prized. In few areas is failure so swiftly and ruthlessly punished, or success so swiftly and extravagantly rewarded.

And still—talent is scarce. It is a woeful fact that despite several generations of free education, our land has produced relatively few

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

first-rate minds; and of those with first-rate brains, fewer have imagination; of those with brains and imagination, fewer still possess judgment. If we ask, in addition, for the special skills and experience involved in the art of communicating, the total amount of talent available to the media is not impressive.

"The best brains" in the land do not gravitate to the media—if by brains we mean skill in analyzing complexities, or sustaining abstract propositions for prolonged intellectual operations. But the best brains would not necessarily make the best editors, or writers, or producers, or publishers—at least they would not long survive in a competitive market.

The media are enterprises, not IQ tests. They feed on inventiveness, not analytic discipline. They require creative skills and nonstandardized competences. Their content has, thus far at least, resisted the standardized and accumulative statement of propositions of a Euclid or an Adam Smith.

"The mass media do not print or broadcast the best material that is submitted to them."

To edit is to judge; to judge is, inevitably, to reward some and disappoint others.

The assumption that a vast flow of material pours into the editorial offices of the media—from which publishers or producers simply select the worst—is simply incorrect. A huge proportion of what finally appears in magazines, radio, and television was "dreamed up" inside the media offices, and ordered from the staff or from freelance writers. And as often as not, even when the best talent is employed, at the highest prices, and given complete freedom, the results disappoint expectations. Excellence is not necessarily achieved because it is sought.*

"The mass media cannot afford to step on anyone's toes."

The following recent articles in popular magazines most conspicuously stepped on quite powerful toes: What Protestants Fear About Catholics; Cigarettes and Lung Cancer; Birth Control; The Disgrace

* Yet consider that the mass media have recently presented to the public such indubitable highbrows as, say, Jacques Maritain, Reinhold Niebuhr, Robert Oppenheimer, Edith Hamilton, Aldous Huxley, Warren Weaver, Edith Sitwell, Jacques Barzun, James Bryant Conant, and Julian Huxley.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of Our Hospitals; Fee-Splitting by Doctors; Agnosticism; Financial Shenanigans and Stock Manipulations; A Mercy Killing; The Murder of Negroes in the South.

The movies and television recently offered all but the deaf and blind these scarcely soporific themes: miscegenation; adultery; dope addiction; white-Negro tensions; the venality of television; the vulgarity of movie executives; the cowardice of a minister, a banker; hypocrisy in business and advertising; big business and call girls; the degeneracy of Southern whites.

It was long assumed that the most sacred of sacred cows in a capitalist society is the Businessman or Big Business as an institution. But in recent years we have been exposed to a striking number of revelations about Business. Advertising men and methods, presumably too "powerful" to expose, much less deride, have been raked with coals of fire—in media which depend upon advertisers and advertising. "The Man in the Grey Flannel Suit" became a symbol of conformity to the masses, no less than the intellectual, through the mass media.

It is worth noticing that the sheer size of an audience crucially influences the content of what is communicated to it. Taboos, in movies or television, are not simply the fruit of cowardice among producers (though their anxiety is often disproportionate, and their candor unnecessarily hampered by pessimistic assumptions of what public reaction will be). Taboos are often functions of audience size, age-range, and heterogeneity. Things can be communicated to the few which cannot be communicated (at least not in the same way) to the many.

Books, magazines, and newspapers can discuss sex, homosexuality, masturbation, venereal disease, abortion, dope addiction, in ways not so easily undertaken on television or film. The reader reads alone—and this is a fact of great importance to those who write for him.

"The mass media do not give the public enough or adequate information about the serious problems of our time."

Never in history has the public been offered so much, so often, in such detail, for so little. I do not mean that Americans know as much as intellectuals think they ought to know, or wish they did know, about the problems which confront us. I do mean that the media already offer the public far more news, facts, information, and interpretations than the public takes the trouble to digest. I find it

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

impossible to escape the conclusion that, apart from periods of acute crisis, most people do not want to be *involved*, in precisely those areas which the intellectual finds most absorbing and meaningful.

Consider these recent authors and subjects in popular journalism: Winston Churchill on the war; Harry S. Truman on the presidency; Geoffrey Crowther on United States-British relations; William O. Douglas on Russia; Dean Acheson on Berlin; Joseph Alsop on Suez; George Kennan on Europe; Henry Kissinger on nuclear weapons; Adlai Stevenson on nine different countries and their problems; Nehru on India and the West; Ben-Gurion on the Middle East.

I wonder how many academic journals have been more relevant or edifying.

Do intellectuals find it unnoteworthy that, year after year, four to five times as many citizens in New York City choose the *Daily News* as against the New York *Times* or *Herald Tribune*? Or that for decades the citizens of Chicago have preferred the Chicago *Tribune* to competitors closer to the intellectuals' heart? Or that for decades the people of Los Angeles have voted in favor of the Los Angeles *Times*, at the expense of less parochial competitors?

"The aesthetic level of the mass media is appalling: truth is sacrificed to the happy ending, escapism is exalted, romance, violence, melodrama prevail."

The mass media do not attempt to please intellectuals, on either the aesthetic or the conceptual plane. Some commentators believe that if the media offered the public less trivia, the taste of the public would perforce be improved. But if the media give the public too little of what they want, and too much of what they don't want (too soon), they would simply cease to be mass media—and would be replaced by either "massier" competitors or would drive the public to increased expenditures of time on sports, parlor games, gambling, and other familiar methods of protecting the self from the ardors of thought or the terrors of solitude.

The question of proportion (how much "light stuff" or staple insipidity to include as against how much heavy or "uplifting" material) is one of the more perplexing problems any editor faces. It is far from uncommon to hear an editor remark that he will run a feature which he knows will be read by "less than 5 per cent of our readers."

I suspect that intellectuals tend to judge the highbrow by its

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

peaks and the nonhighbrow by its average. If we look at the peaks in both cases, how much do the mass media suffer by comparison? American movies, for instance, caught in staggering costs (and, therefore, risks), have produced, in a short span of time, such films as *The Bridge on the River Kwai, Marty, The African Queen, Twelve Angry Men, The Defiant Ones, High Noon, The Sheepman, Seven Brides for Seven Brothers,* etc.

Television, beset by the problem of a heterogeneous audience, and submitting to the disgraceful practice of advertisers permitted to exercise editorial censorship, has produced some extraordinary news and documentary programs, and such dramas as: *Middle of the Night, Patterns, Little Moon of Alban, Days of Wine and Roses, The Bridge of San Luis Rey, The Winslow Boy, Requiem for a Heavyweight.* CBS's "Camera Three" recently presented, with both skill and taste, three programs dramatizing Dostoevski's *Notes from the Underground, A File for Fathers* (scenes from Lord Chesterfield, Lewis Carroll, Oscar Wilde), *Père Goriot,* Chekhov's *The Proposal.*

In my opinion, some of the more insightful work of our time can be found in the mass media, for example, the comic strip *Peanuts,* which throws an original and enchanting light on children; the comic strip *Li'l Abner,* which is often both as illuminating and as savage as social satire should be; the movies of, say, William Wyler, George Stevens, Jules Dassin, John Huston, David Lean, Delbert Mann.

Intellectuals generally discover "artists" in the popular arts long after the public, with less rarefied aesthetic categories, has discovered them. Perhaps there is rooted in the character structure of intellectuals an aversion, or an inability, to participate in certain sectors of life; they do seem blind to the fact that the popular can be meritorious. This changes with time (e.g., consider the reputations of Twain, Dickens, Dumas, Balzac, Lardner). And a Jack Benny or Phil Silvers may yet achieve the classic dimension now permitted the Marx Brothers, who—once despised as broad vaudevillians—have become the eggheads' delight.

"The mass media corrupt and debase public taste; they create the kind of audience that enjoys cheap and trivial entertainment."

This implies that demand (public taste or preference) has become a spurious function of manipulated supply. Here the evidence from

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Great Britain is illuminating: for years the government-owned BBC and the admirable Third Program offered the British public superior fare: excellent music, learned talks, literate discussions. For years, the noncommercial radio defended the bastions of culture. Yet when the British public was offered choices on television, it dismayed Anglophiles by taking to its heart the same silly quiz shows, panel shows, Westerns, melodramas, and "situation comedies" which the critics of daily newspapers deplore both in London and New York.

Or consider what happened in March 1959 when the Granada TV network, a British commercial chain, presented *The Skin of Our Teeth* with no less a star than Vivien Leigh—and in her first appearance on television. The noncommercial BBC ran, opposite the Wilder play and Lady Vivien, a twenty-five-year-old American movie, *Follow the Fleet,* with Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire. The English critics sang rare hosannahs for Thornton Wilder's play, its glamorous star, the script, the direction, the production. But for every seventeen homes in London that chose the Pulitzer Prize play, sixty-six preferred the twenty-five-year-old musical. Outside of London, the ratio was even more depressing. Viewers by the millions, reported Reuters, switched their dials away from Wilder and Leigh to Fred and Ginger. The head of the Granada network even castigated the BBC in the press, urging that it be "ashamed of itself" for seducing a public that might have adored Art by offering it Entertainment. (A similar *contretemps* occurred on American television when the magnificent production of *Green Pastures* lost viewers by the millions to the ghastly *Mike Todd Party* in Madison Square Garden.) The final and crushing irony lies in the fact that *Follow the Fleet* put a BBC program among the first ten, in popularity, for the first time in the year.

Doubtless the mass media can do more, much more, to elevate what the public reads, sees, and hears. But the media cannot do this as easily or as rapidly as is often assumed. Indeed, they cannot get too far in front of their audiences without suffering the fate of predecessors who tried just that. There is considerable evidence to support the deflating view that the media, on the whole, are considerably *ahead* of the masses—in intelligence, in taste, in values, e.g., the vocabulary in almost any popular journal, not excluding fan magazines, is often too "highbrow" for its readers.

It seems to me a fair question to ask whether the intelligence or taste of the public is really worse today than it was before the mass media came along.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

"The mass media are what they are because they are operated solely as money-making enterprises."

Publishers and producers are undoubtedly motivated by a desire for profits. But this is not *all* that motivates them. Publishers and producers are no less responsive than intellectuals to "ego values"; they are no less eager to win respect and respectability from their peers; they respond to both internalized and external "reference groups"; they seek esteem—from the self and from others.

Besides, producers know that a significant percentage of what they present in the mass media will not be as popular as what might be substituted—but it is presented nonetheless. Why? Partly because of nonpecuniary values, and partly because of what critics of the crass profit-motive seem blind to: the fact that part of the competitive process involves a continuous search for products which can win favor with audiences not attracted to, or satisfied by, the prevailing output. New and minority audiences are constantly courted by the media, e.g., the strictly "egghead" programs on television, the new magazines which arise, and flourish, because they fill a need, as *Scientific American, American Heritage.*

Whenever profits, used as either a carrot or a stick, are criticized, it is tacitly assumed that reliance on other human impulses would serve man better. Is this so? Do virtue, probity, self-sacrifice guarantee excellence? It seems to me that most of the horrors of human history have been the work not of skeptical or cynical or realistic men, but of those persuaded of their superior virtue.

To replace publication for profit by publication via subsidy would of course be to exchange one set of imperfections for another.* The postal system offers scant support to those who assume that nonprofit enterprise is necessarily better than private competition (I hasten to add that in some fields, e.g., public health, it clearly is).

It should be noted, parenthetically, that anyone who enters the magazine or newspaper field in the expectation of high profits is either singularly naïve, extremely optimistic, or poorly informed: few

* It is unthinkable, for instance, that any open competitive system would have barred from the air someone like Winston Churchill—who was not given access to BBC, for his then-maverick opinions, from 1934 to 1939. Nor is it likely that a government-controlled network would be able to withstand the furore that followed CBS's initial interview with Nikita Khrushchev. Nor would a governmentally supervised program dare to present a show such as *The Plot to Kill Stalin.*

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

areas of American business show so high a mortality rate, are plagued by such unpredictabilities, promise so many headaches, and return so low a net profit. Successful magazines earn as modest a profit as three percent on invested capital. To the purely profit-minded, business has long offered innumerable opportunities outside of publishing which far surpass it in profitability, security, or potential.

"The mass media are dominated—or too much influenced —by advertisers."

The influence of advertising is often too great—even if that influence is one-tenth as potent as many assume it to be. The editorial function should be as entirely free of non-editorial influences as possible.

But publishers, producers, and editors would respond to power or influence *even if all advertising were abolished.* It is an inescapable fact of human organization that men adjust to power (that, indeed, is one of power's attributes); that men consider, or try to anticipate, the effect of their acts on those who hold most of whatever is most prized in a society.

There is a reverse and paradoxical angle to advertising: when a newspaper or magazine, a radio or television station becomes successful, the advertiser needs it as much as the other way around. Revenues from many advertisers increase the capacity to resist pressure from individual advertisers. Organs which can be "bought" nearly always decline in prosperity and influence.

Purely professional calculations often override vested interest. Some news or stories are so significant that it is impossible to prevent their publication.

The instance of the cigarette industry, mentioned above, is worth notice. Tobacco companies represent one of the largest and most consistent sources of national advertising revenue. Yet within an hour after medical reports appeared linking cigarette smoking to lung cancer, they were fully and dramatically presented to the public—not only on the front pages of newspapers but in radio and television reporting as well. The news was simply too big, too "newsworthy" to be suppressed (even though several discussion programs shied away from the subject). The deficiencies of automobiles, where safety is concerned, have been analyzed in magazines which receive huge advertising revenues from automobile companies.

This is not to say that all truths which threaten power—in business, in the arts, even in the groves of academe—always gain as swift and

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

public an airing as they deserve. They often do not. They do not because men, even men in power, are often timid, or weak, or frightened, or avaricious, or opportunistic, or unwise, or short-sighted. Some media operators, like some politicians, some clergymen, some labor leaders, some economists, are overly sensitive to the side on which their bread is buttered.

There is another and telling body of evidence about advertising on which no one, so far as I know, has commented: motion pictures accept no advertisements, never did, never depended on it, and were never "at the mercy of advertisers."* Yet of all the mass media, it is the movies which have been most parochial and timorous. Is it because movies do depend entirely on box-office receipts, and have no advertising revenues to subsidize independnce?

Advertisers seem to me to exercise their most pernicious influence in television. For in television, advertisers are permitted to decide what shall or shall not appear in the programs they sponsor. This seems to me insupportable. An advertiser in a newspaper or magazine buys a piece of space in which to advertise his product. He does not buy a voice on the news desk or at the editorial table. But the television advertiser buys time both for his commercials and for *the time between commercials*; he becomes a producer and publisher himself. I am convinced that this is bad for the public, bad for television, and (ultimately) bad for the sponsors.†

"The mass media do not provide an adequate forum for minority views—the dissident and unorthodox."

Producers and publishers give more space and time to minority views (which include the *avant-garde*) than numerical proportions require. They feel that it is the function of specialized journals to carry specialized content. The popular media carry far more material of this kind than anyone would have predicted two decades ago.

The democratic society must insure a viable public forum for the dissenter—in politics, morals, arts. That forum will never be as large as the dissenters themselves want. But I know of no perfect way to determine who shall have what access to how many—at the expense

* Some movie theaters show advertisements on their screens before and after a feature, but advertising is not to be found *in* movies.

† When I wrote a similar criticism in *Harper's Magazine* in 1958, certain television executives hotly denied this. That was eighteen months before the recent and sensational revelations of advertiser-control over quiz shows.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

of whom else—except to keep pressing for as free a market as we can achieve.

It may seem to some readers that I have substituted an indictment of the masses for an indictment of the mass media; that I have assigned the role of villain to the masses in a social drama in which human welfare and public enlightenment are hamstrung by the mediocrity, laziness, and indifference of the populace. I hope that detachment will not be mistaken for cynicism.

I should be the first to stress the immensity of the social gains which public education and literacy alone have made possible. The rising public appreciation of music, painting, ballet; the growth of libraries; the fantastic sales of paperback books (however much they are skewed by *Peyton Place* or the works of Mickey Spillane), the striking diffusion of "cultural activities" in communities throughout the land, the momentous fact that popular magazines *can* offer the public the ruminations of such nonpopular minds as Paul Tillich or Sir George Thomson—the dimensions of these changes are a tribute to the achievements of that society which has removed from men the chains of caste and class that hampered human achievement through the centuries. I, for one, do not lament the passing of epochs in which "high culture" flourished while the majority of mankind lived in ignorance and indignity.

What I have been emphasizing here is the inevitable gap between the common and the superior. More particularly, I have been embroidering the theme of the intellectual's curious reluctance to accept evidence. Modern intellectuals seem *guilty* about reaching conclusions that were once the *a priori* convictions of the aristocrat. It is understandable that twentieth-century intellectuals should dread snobbery, at one end of the social scale, as much as they shun mob favor at the other. But the intellectual's snobbery is of another order, and involves a tantalizing paradox: a contempt for what *hoi polloi* enjoy, and a kind of proletarian ethos that tacitly denies inequalities of talent and taste.

The recognition of facts has little bearing on motivations and should surely not impute preferences. The validity of an idea has nothing to do with who propounds it—or whom it outrages. The author is aware that he is inviting charges of Brahminism, misanthropy, a reactionary "unconscious," or heaven knows what else. But is it really heresy to the democratic credo for intellectuals to admit, if only in the privacy of professional confessionals, that they

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

are, in fact, more literate and more skillful—in diagnosis, induction, and generalization, if in nothing else—than their fellow-passengers on the ship of state?

Perhaps the intellectual's guilt, when he senses incipient snobbery within himself, stems from his uneasiness at being part of an elite, moreover, a new elite which is not shored up by ancient and historic sanctions. For intellectualism has been divorced from its traditional *cachet* and from the majesty with which earlier societies invested their elites: a classical education, Latin or Greek (in any case, a language not comprehensible to the untutored), a carefully cultivated accent, the inflection of the well born, the well bred, or the priestly. One of the painful experiences spared intellectuals in the past was hearing Ideas discussed—with profundity or insight—in accents which attest to birth on "the other side of the tracks."

It may be difficult for shopkeepers' sons to admit their manifest superiority over the world they left: parents, siblings, comrades. But the intellectual who struggles with a sinful sense of superiority, and who feels admirable sentiments of loyalty to his non-U origins, must still explain why it was that his playmates and classmates did not join him in the noble dedication to learning and the hallowed pursuit of truth. The triumph of mass education is to be found not simply in the increment of those who can read, write, add, and subtract. It is to be found in a much more profound and enduring revolution: the provision of opportunities to express the self, and pursue the self's values, opportunities not limited to the children of a leisure class, or an aristocracy, or a landed gentry, or a well-heeled bourgeoisie. The true miracle of public education is that no elite can decide where the next intellectual will come from.

Each generation creates its own devils, and meets its own Waterloo on the heartless field of reality. The Christian Fathers blamed the Prince of Darkness for preventing perfectible man from reaching Paradise. Anarchists blamed the state. Marxists blame the class system. Pacifists blame the militarists. And our latter-day intellectuals seem to blame the mass media for the lamentable failure of more people to attain the bliss of intellectual grace. This is a rank disservice to intellectuals themselves, for it dismisses those attributes of character and ability—discipline, curiosity, persistence, the renunciation of worldly rewards—which make intellectuals possible at all. The compulsive egalitarianism of eggheads even seems to lure them into a conspicuous disinterest in the possible determinism of heredity.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Responsibility increases with capacity, and should be demanded of those in positions of power. Just as I hold the intellectual more responsible than others for the rigorous exploration of phenomena and the courageous enunciation of truths, so, too, do I ask for better and still better performance from those who have the awesome power to shape men's minds.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

FRANK STANTON

Parallel Paths

THE MASS MEDIA are tempting targets: they are big, they are conspicuous, they are easily distorted, they invite bright and brittle condemnations—and they do have built-in limitations of their virtues. They have shown themselves inefficient warriors, and on the whole have tended to be too little concerned with what the intellectuals have had to say.

On the other side, the fondest attachment of the intellectuals is to theory not to practice; more importantly, there is among many intellectuals an uncongeniality with some of the basic ingredients of a democratic society and, in many cases, a real distrust of them. Democratic procedures, to some extent even democratic values, necessarily involve quantitative considerations, about which intellectuals are always uneasy. This uneasiness is not restricted to cultural matters. For example, it influences their view of the legislative processes and of economic interplays in our society. The intellectual is highly impatient of much that is imperfect but also inevitable in democracies. But despite these differences between intellectuals and the mass media, I think that they have something in common, that their efforts are fundamentally going toward the same general goal but along different paths.

I take it to be the distinguishing characteristic of civilized man that he is concerned with the environment and destiny of himself and his kind. The end of all scholarship, all art, all science, is the increase of knowledge and of understanding. The rubrics of scholarship have no inherent importance except in making the expansion of knowledge easier by creating system and order and catholicity. The freedom of the arts has no inherent value except in its admitting unlimited comments upon life and the materials of life. There is no *mystique* about science; its sole wonder exists in its continuous

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

expansion of both the area and the detail of man's comprehension of his physical being and his surroundings.

The ultimate use of all man's knowledge and his art and his science cannot be locked up into little compartments to which only the initiate hold the keys. It cannot be contemplated solely by closeted groups, or imposed from above. If vitality is to be a force in the general life of mankind, it must sooner or later reach all men and enter into the general body of awarenesses. The advancement of the human lot consists in more people being aware of more, knowing more, understanding more.

The mass media believe in the broad dissemination of as much as can be comprehended by as many as possible. They employ techniques to arrest attention, to recruit interest, to lead their audiences into new fields. Often they must sacrifice detail or annotation for the sake of the general idea.

Although it may be presumptuous, perhaps I can suggest a general contrast in the position of the professional intellectual: he feels that knowledge, art, and understanding are all precious commodities that ought not to be diluted. He believes that if things were left to him this dilution would not happen, because the doors of influence would be closed to the inadequately educated until they had earned the right to open them, just as he did. His view is that if standards remain beyond the reach of the many, the general level will gradually rise.

In this respect, I dissent from Mr. Rosten's conclusion that the intellectuals "project their own tastes, yearnings, and values upon the masses."* I do not believe there is such an irreducible gap between the tastes, yearnings, and values of the intellectuals and those of the masses. The difficulty is that the intellectuals do not project at all to the uninitiated. Their hope is to attract them, providing that it is not too many, too fast. They would wait for more and more people to qualify to the higher group, although they themselves want to stay a little ahead of the new arrivals.

This accounts, I believe, for the intellectuals' fear of popularization. The history of the Book-of-the-Month Club illustrates this point. Intellectuals have repeatedly made statements (not entirely characterized by a disciplined array of evidence), that the book club would bring about an "emasculation of the human mind whereby everyone

* Leo Rosten, see page 333.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

loses the power of his determination in reading,"[1] and that the club's selections were "in many cases, not even an approximation to what the average intelligent reader wants."[2] Yet a study by a Columbia University researcher found that over an eighteen-year span the reaction of reviewers, critics, and professors to the Book-of-the-Month Club selections was far higher in terms of approval than their reaction to random samples of nonselections.[3]

By comparing the two heaviest book selections of the club in 1927 to their two lightest ones in 1949 (without other evidence) Stanley Edgar Hyman suggests that the standards of selection are deteriorating.* Yet he makes no mention of the fact that in 1949 the Book-of-the-Month Club for the first time in its history distributed a serious contemporary play, *Death of a Salesman*, that it distributed a serious discussion of a vital issue in Vannevar Bush's *Modern Arms and Free Men*, that it put into hundreds of thousands of homes William Edward Langer's *Encyclopedia of World History*, that it brought to its subscribers George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-four*, Winston Churchill's *Their Finest Hour*, and A. B. Guthrie's Pulitzer-Prize novel, *The Way West*.

Let me press what Mr. Hyman regards as evidence of "deterioration" of the Book-of-the-Month Club selections to the conclusion at which he himself arrived, that in the decade since 1949 "the selections seem to have continued to deteriorate." Even a glance at the evidence would refute this slashing generality. Indeed, the books distributed by the club throughout the 1950's suggest some high levels of excellence: in fiction there have been three books by William Faulkner, three by James Gould Cozzens, two by John Hersey, seven plays by Shaw, six by Thornton Wilder, Eugene O'Neill's *Long Day's Journey into Night*, novels by Feuchtwanger, Salinger, Thomas Mann, Hemingway, John Cheever, and James Agee; there have been eight historical works by Churchill, two by Schlesinger, two by Van Wyck Brooks, others by Morison and Nevins, Dumas Malone, Bernard DeVoto, Catherine Drinker Bowen's life of John Adams, Toynbee's *Study of History*, two of Edith Hamilton's studies of ancient Greece, and Max Lerner's *American Civilization*; in poetry, Stephen Vincent Benet, and *The Oxford Book of American Verse;* from the classics, Bulfinch's *The Age of Fable*, Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, the Hart edition of Shakespeare, a new translation of *The Odyssey*, works by

* Stanley E. Hyman, see page 378.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Dostoevsky, Gustave Flaubert, and Mark Twain; in art, Francis Henry Taylor's *Fifty Centuries of Art*, John Walker's *Masterpieces of Painting from the National Gallery*, and *Art Treasures of the Louvre*; in reference works, Fowler's *Modern English Usage*, Palmer's *Atlas of World History*, Audubon's *Birds*, and Evans' *Dictionary of Contemporary American Usage*.[4]

To turn to television, I hear over and over such generalities as, "There is nothing but Westerns on television," or "Television is all mysteries and blood and thunder." Such charges usually come from people who do not look at television, but that does not modify their position. As in the case just cited, there is no uncertainty about this exaggeration; one can look at the actual record.

Let us take by way of example the week of February 15 to 21, 1959, on the CBS Television Network, because that week had nothing exceptional about it. During the preceding week, there were such outstanding broadcasts as Tolstoy's *Family Happiness* and a repetition of the distinguished documentary, *The Face of Red China.* In the following week, the programs included the New York Philharmonic and the Old Vic Company's *Hamlet.* Returning to the unexceptional week of February 15, about 4½ hours, or 1/18 of CBS Television's total program content of 75½ hours, were devoted to Westerns; about 5 hours, or 1/15, were taken up by mysteries. On the other hand, 7¾ hours, or about 1/10 of the total number of hours, were devoted to news and public affairs. Altogether, some 78 percent of the evening programing was occupied by drama, fairly evenly divided among serious, comedy, mystery, Westerns, and romance-adventure.

Looking at the record for the first five months of 1959, I find on the CBS Television Network alone four Philharmonic concerts; 90-minute-long productions of plays by Shakespeare, Barrie, and Saroyan, adaptations of Shaw and Ibsen, full-length productions of *The Browning Version*, Melville's *Billy Budd*, Henry James' *Wings of the Dove*, Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and many distinguished original dramas; thirteen conversations with people of such diverse minds and talents as James Conant, Sir Thomas Beecham, and James Thurber; nine historic surveys of great personalities or developments of the twentieth century; and nine specially scheduled programs inquiring into major issues in public affairs, such as the Cuban revolution, the closing of integrated high schools, statehood for Hawaii, and the Geneva Conference.

I am citing these for two purposes. One is to show how, by using selected examples, it can be as easily proved that television is exclu-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

sively instructive as that it is exclusively diverting. My other purpose is by way of considering a practical response to the complaints that the intellectuals voice about all the mass media.

What do the intellectuals really want? Do they want us to do *only* serious programing, only programs of profound cultural value? Or do they just want us to do more? And if so, what is more? Do they want the Book-of-the-Month Club to distribute only heavy reading, or just more? Does the club do harm because it has included books of humor among the thirty to forty selections, alternates, and dividends it distributes each year? Is there any serious belief anywhere that among the paperback books we ought to censor what we consider culturally insignificant and allow only what we consider culturally enriching? Or do not the intellectuals really want to stake out reserves, admission to which would be granted only on their terms, in their way, at their pleasure?

Television occupies the air waves under the franchise of the American people. It has a threefold function: the dissemination of information, culture, and entertainment. There are different levels and different areas of interest at which these are sought by a hundred and fifty million people. It is our purpose—and our endlessly tantalizing task—to make certain that we have enough of every area at every level of interest to hold the attention of significant segments of the public at one time on another. Therefore we do have programs more likely to be of interest to the intellectuals than to others. We can try to include everybody somewhere in our program planning, but we cannot possibly aim all the time only at the largest possible audience.

The practice of sound television programing is the same as the practice of any sound editorial operation. It involves always anticipating (if you can) and occasionally leading your subscribers or readers or audience. The "mass of consumers" does not decide, in the sense that it initiates programs, but it does respond to our decisions. A mass medium survives when it maintains a satisfactory batting average on affirmative responses, and it goes down when negative responses are too numerous or too frequent. But so also does the magazine with a circulation of five thousand—as the high mortality rate of the "little magazines" testifies. Success in editing, whether a mass medium or an esoteric quarterly, consists in so respecting the audience that one labors to bring to it something that meets an interest, a desire, or a need that has still to be completely filled. Obviously, the narrower and the more intellectually homogeneous

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

your audience, the easier this is to do; and conversely, the larger it is and the more heterogeneous, the more difficult.

I must dissent from the unqualified charge that "advertisers today . . . exercise their most pernicious influence in television." The basis of this charge is that, while an advertiser buys space in a magazine with no power of choice as to the editorial content of the magazine, on television he allegedly controls both the commercials and what program goes into the time space. The matter is not so simple.

In the first place I categorically assert that no news or public-affairs program at CBS, however expensive to the sponsor, has ever been subject to his control, influence, or approval. There is a total and absolute independence in this respect.

An advertiser in magazines does have the power to associate his advertising with editorial content by his choice of a magazine. If he makes a household detergent, he can choose a magazine whose appeal is to housewives. In television, he can achieve this association only by seeking out kinds of programs, or, more properly, the kinds of audience to which specific programs appeal. This is of course why a razor blade company wants to sponsor sports programs. But this does not mean that the company is going to referee the game or coach the team. In television, for the most part, advertisers are sold programs by networks or by independent producers, somewhat in the sense that space in the magazines is sold by sales efforts based on the kind of audience the magazine reaches. At the same time, we are perfectly aware that in the rapid growth of television the problem of the advertiser's relationship with program content has not yet been satisfactorily solved. It is an area to which we are going to have to devote more thought and evolve new approaches.

I return to a central point: that some sort of hostility on the part of the intellectuals toward the mass media is inevitable, because the intellectuals are a minority, one not really reconciled to some basic features of democratic life. They are an articulate and cantankerous minority, not readily given to examining evidence about the mass media and then arriving at conclusions, but more likely to come to conclusions and then select the evidence to support them. But they are an invaluable minority. We all do care what they think because they are a historic force on which our society must always rely for self-examination and advancement. They constitute the outposts of our intellectual life as a people, they probe around frontiers in their splendid sparsity, looking around occasionally to see where—how

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

far behind—the rest of us are. We are never going to catch up, but at least we shall always have somewhere to go.

As for the mass media, they are always in the process of trying, and they never really find the answers. They also are the victims of their pressing preoccupations, and can undoubtedly improve their performances, better understand their own roles, learn more rapidly. I feel that intellectuals and the media could really serve one another better if both parties informed themselves more fully, brought somewhat more sympathy to each other's examinations, and stopped once in a while to redefine their common goals. We in the mass media have probably been negligent in not drawing the intellectuals more intimately into our counsels, and the intellectuals, by and large, have not studied the evidence carefully enough before discussing the mass media. The mass media need the enlightened criticism, the thorough examination, of the intellectuals. When the latter are willing to promise these, we shall all make progress faster and steadier.

REFERENCES

1 Edward F. Stevens, cited in Charles Lee, *The Hidden Public* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1958), p. 51.

2 *Ibid.*

3 Joseph W. Kappel, "Book Clubs and the Evaluation of Books," *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 1948, *12*: 243-252.

4 For complete selections for 1926-1957, see Lee, *op. cit.*, pp. 161-194.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JAMES JOHNSON SWEENEY

The Artist and the Museum in a Mass Society

ONE SHOULD PUT ASIDE at the outset the notion that there is any essential threat in the mass media to the genuinely creative artist or to genuine art. The artist, qua artist, is an individualist, and the quality of his art lies in its individuality. A work of art is the concrete record of an artist's discovery of himself, first to himself, then at a second remove to the world around him. In this sense, what may from one point of view be seen as a "monologue" may also be regarded as a hypothetical duologue or conversation.

The true artist does not feel the need to address a mass meeting to have the sense of conversing with his fellow man. He speaks to an ideal audience, but what speaker succeeds in envisaging his audience otherwise? Consequently, for the advantages of audience the mass media may offer, the true artist will not be tempted, nor will the true artist's work suffer, in a culture given its broad color by those advantages. Only the current equivalents of pseudo-artists who in the past have sacrificed their individuality to other temptations will suffer from the seductions of mass media.

Any suggested threat to the creative artist through mass culture does, however, serve very frequently to obscure the true issue. For the real present danger is not to the creative artist or to creative art, but to the conditioning of the public in its response to creative art, particularly in the field of painting and sculpture. As S. E. Hyman has pointed out: "The technological revolution does not yet seem to have brought the plastic arts into mass culture. . . . Mass-produced copies of pictures and sculptures have been around for a long time and make all but the most contemporary work cheaply available in

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

reproduction, but they seem to have had little of the impact on taste of paperbacks and long-playing records."*

Whether or not long-playing records have had any profound effect on musical discrimination, if the test is not merely one of recognizing accepted works, is difficult to say. It seems evident that an ear educated only by long-playing records would be as far from the real experience of a musical work as any eye trained by color reproductions would be from the sensuous experience of actual painting. In Hyman's linking the influences of paperbacks and long-playing records, it seems to me he has slightly mixed his categories of reproduction. The paperback is merely a less luxurious form of book, for the text is, or should be, the same; but between a long-playing record and a live rendition there is a difference in sense stimuli, just as there is between a painting and a printed reproduction of a painting—perhaps not a wide difference, but an essential one.

What both long-playing records and color reproductions basically provide is "information" about the works of art in question, not an immediate experience of either the music as played or the actual painting. In painting and sculpture the danger lies in the confusion which can so readily develop between information about a work of art and the experience an immediate sensuous contact with a work of art provides. And a true appreciation of works of art in these fields can only come through direct experience.

Reproductions of painting and sculpture speak to the eye of the observer through materials different from those of the original. The material in which an artist works is an essential element of his expression. Materials different from those employed in the original must provide different relationships in the result. At best, the reproduction can only resemble or suggest the original, although at times it misleads the uncritical observer by its pretension to do more.

Reproduction in the mass media will never supply a truly adequate equivalent for the immediate experience of a painting or a sculpture. What might be achieved is an equivalent expression within the limitations of the medium, much as one had hoped (and still hopes) for a color cinema which would set out, not to reproduce effects, but to exploit the potentialities of creating new forms through color and light effects—fresh expressions of visual order rather than the imitation of already existent expressions. But because the technological

* Stanley E. Hyman, from an earlier draft of his article, as delivered to the participants of this symposium.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

revolution has not yet found a way either to bring the pictorial and sculptural arts into mass culture, or to create a fresh expression within the various media which might be analogous, information is offered as a substitute, and the indolent public is readily led to accepting it, with the resultant danger of eventual confusion between the two.

The general educational approach to the appreciation of painting and sculpture is in part a consequence of mass culture and the influence of mass media; in part, it is a result of indolence. I refer to a general emphasis on the informational approach in schools and even in museums where there is so little excuse for it. It is easier to approach painting or sculpture through the ears than through the eyes: our temptation today is to lean on the accepted authority, rather than to look for ourselves and respond directly to the sensory stimuli of the work of art. Yet when we speak of accepted authority with regard to a work of art, this can only refer to a work of the past. The viewer who leans on accepted authority can never depend on such a crutch in the case of a truly fresh work, nor can he ever experience a direct communication between a work of art and himself: it must always be at second hand.

The indolent approach to the visual arts is now generally encouraged as a result of the hasty democratization of education of the past century. Everyone has a right to know and appreciate all; therefore, everyone ought to know and appreciate all, and if one does not, it is cause for shame, and one should pretend to be a connoisseur. Art is long; time is short; therefore, any means toward creating this impression of familiarity is welcome, whether it actually interferes with a true, direct appreciation of a work or not.

Museums and educational institutions in general for the past three or four decades (those in which mass media have been developing apace) have fallen deep into this betrayal of the public in the field of the visual arts. Perhaps museums, as looked upon by certain museum trustees, are primarily intended as instruments of popular education along mass media lines. The interest of museum trustees in popular attendance would point this way. Attendance statistics would readily show them that an exhibition of painting or sculpture in an idiom familiar to the public and by an artist or artists whose name it knows will draw crowds. By contrast, the attendance at an exhibition of work by a less known or less publicized artist, or artists, even though more interesting in quality and freshness to the exploring gallery-goer or connoisseur, will suffer. To catch and hold the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

attention of the indolent visitor, elaborate biographical, critical, explanatory labels, even canned lectures over earphones, are provided, like aesthetic water wings, so one may dabble about without getting too deep into the water. Art should never be spoon-fed nor offered in capsule, digested form. Yet this is what is being essayed in our museums today, simply because museum trustees or perhaps even museum directors are ambitious to embrace the broadest possible public and, in our democratic age, have not the courage to face the fact that the highest experiences of art are only for the elite who "have earned in order to possess."

In the case of a commercial television station, one can adopt a degree of leniency toward this attitude: profits are involved. To a certain extent, the public is bound to dictate the editorial policies if the station is to succeed financially. But in the case of a museum there is no such ground for exculpation. A museum is a nonprofit organization which should be responsible only to its own standards. There is no comparison between the freedom which a museum or a publication like *Partisan Review* should enjoy in maintaining these standards and the responsibility of a television network to its consumers.

The function of a museum is the encouragement of the enjoyment of art and through this the indirect encouragement of the creative artist. Visual art is basically a sensory experience, one of relationships of form, of colors, and of associations, physical, unconscious, or representational. Therefore, the first step in a museum's educational process is the confrontation of the spectator with the actual work of art, so that the artist can speak directly to the spectator. The immediate sensory experience of a work of art is the only direct approach to the artist's communication. Mass media cannot provide this experience, but the museum can and should. On this foundation of a direct sensory acquaintance, the experience of a work of art may be soundly enriched by its peripheral associations. It is the responsibility of the museum to stimulate the indolent public to approach art directly through aesthetic experience, pleasurable and enjoyable, and to incite the visitor to make the effort, always more or less arduous, which is necessary for him to enter into communication with the artist through the artist's personal expression. For it is this interaction between the observer and the creative artist that makes it possible to maintain or raise standards of judgment and appreciation.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A lowering of standards would appear inevitable when all or most energies are expended toward raising the lowest or broadest common denominator. In turn, this will encourage a broadening and a dilution of culture, as indeed has been the case over the past thirty years, not only in our own country, but in others where the mass media have developed.

If the general trend lies in this direction, and if even such non-profit institutions as museums widen their embrace to attract the broadest possible number (fit or unfit as the case may be), where are we to look for standards of aesthetic quality in this new culture? Here is where the creative artist must play his part. For if the mass media have no influence on the true artist, who by his essential nature is a seeker, an explorer, always apart and in advance of his fellows, it is he who provides what the mass media fail to give: standards of quality and integrity for our culture as a whole.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

RANDALL JARRELL

A Sad Heart at the Supermarket

THE EMPEROR AUGUSTUS would sometimes say to his Senate: "Words fail me, my Lords; nothing I can say could possibly indicate the depth of my feelings in this matter." But I am speaking about this matter of mass culture, the mass media, not as an Emperor but as a fool, as a suffering, complaining, helplessly nonconforming poet-or-artist-of-a-sort, far off at the obsolescent rear of things: what I say will indicate the depth of my feelings and the shallowness and one-sideedness of my thoughts. If those English lyric poets who went mad during the eighteenth century had told you why the Age of Enlightement was driving them crazy, it would have had a kind of documentary interest: what I say may have a kind of documentary interest.

> The toad beneath the harrow knows
> Exactly where each tooth-point goes;

if you tell me that the field is being harrowed to grow grain for bread, and to create a world in which there will be no more famines, or toads either, I will say, "I know"—but let me tell you where the tooth-points go, and what the harrow looks like from below.

Advertising men, businessmen, speak continually of "media" or "the media" or "the mass media"—one of their trade journals is named, simply, *Media.* It is an impressive word: one imagines Mephistopheles offering Faust media that no man has ever known; one feels, while the word is in one's ear, that abstract, overmastering powers, of a scale and intensity unimagined yesterday, are being offered one by the technicians who discovered and control them—offered, and at a price. The word, like others, has the clear fatal ring of that new world whose space we occupy so luxuriously and precariously; the world that produces mink stoles, rockabilly records,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and tactical nuclear weapons by the million; the world that Attila, Galileo, Hansel and Gretel never knew.

And yet, it's only the plural of "medium." "Medium," says the dictionary, "that which lies in the middle; hence, middle condition or degree. . . . A substance through which a force acts or an effect is transmitted. . . . That through or by which anything is accomplished; as, an advertising *medium*. . . . *Biol.* A nutritive mixture or substance, as broth, gelatin, agar, for cultivating bacteria, fungi, etc." Let us name *our* trade journal *The Medium*. For all these media (television, radio, movies, popular magazines, and the rest) are a single medium, in whose depths we are all being cultivated. This medium is of middle condition or degree, mediocre; it lies in the middle of everything, between a man and his neighbor, his wife, his child, his self; it, more than anything else, is the substance through which the forces of our society act upon us, make us into what our society needs.

And what does it need? For us to need . . . Oh, it needs for us to do or be many things—to be workers, technicians, executives, soldiers, housewives. But first of all, last of all, it needs for us to be buyers; consumers; beings who want much and will want more —who want consistently and insatiably. Find some spell to make us no longer want the stoles, the records, and the weapons, and our world will change into something to us unimaginable. Find some spell to make us realize that the product or service which seemed yesterday an unthinkable luxury is today an inexorable necessity, and our world will go on. It is the Medium which casts this spell—which is this spell. As we look at the television set, listen to the radio, read the magazines, the frontier of necessity is always being pushed forward. The Medium shows us what our new needs are—how often, without it, we should not have known!—and it shows us how they can be satisfied: they can be satisfied by buying something. The act of buying something is at the root of our world: if anyone wishes to paint the beginning of things in our society, he will paint a picture of God holding out to Adam a checkbook or credit card or Charge-A-Plate.

But how quickly our poor naked Adam is turned into a consumer, is linked to others by the great chain of buying!

> No outcast he, bewildered and depressed:
> Along his infant veins are interfused
> The gravitation and the filial bond
> Of nature that connect him with the world.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Children of three or four can ask for a brand of cereal, sing some soap's commercial; by the time that they are twelve they are not children but teen-age consumers, interviewed, graphed, analyzed. They are on their way to becoming that ideal figure of our culture, the knowledgeable consumer. I'll define him: the knowledgeable consumer is someone who, when he goes to Weimar, knows how to buy a Weimaraner. He has learned to understand life as a series of choices among the things and services of this world; because of being an executive, or executive's wife, or performer, or celebrity, or someone who has inherited money, he is able to afford the choices that he makes, with knowing familiarity, among restaurants, resorts, clothes, cars, liners, hits or best-sellers of every kind. We may still go to Methodist or Baptist or Presbyterian churches on Sunday, but the Protestant ethic of frugal industry, of production for its own sake, is gone. Production has come to seem to our society not much more than a condition prior to consumption: "The challenge of today," writes a great advertising agency, "is to make the consumer raise his level of demand." This challenge has been met: the Medium has found it easy to make its people feel the continually increasing lacks, the many specialized dissatisfactions (merging into one great dissatisfaction, temporarily assauged by new purchases) that it needs for them to feel. When, in some magazine, we see the Medium at its most nearly perfect, we hardly know which half is entertaining and distracting us, which half making us buy: some advertisement may be more ingeniously entertaining than the text beside it, but it is the text which has made us long for a product more passionately. When one finishes *Holiday* or *Harper's Bazaar* or *House and Garden* or *The New Yorker* or *High Fidelity* or *Road and Track* or—but make your own list—buying something, going somewhere seems a necessary completion to the act of reading the magazine. Reader, isn't buying or fantasy-buying an important part of your and my emotional life? (If you reply, *No,* I'll think of you with bitter envy as more than merely human; as deeply un-American.) It is a standard joke of our culture that when a woman is bored or sad she buys something to make herself feel better; but in this respect we are all women together, and can hear complacently the reminder of how feminine this consumer-world of ours is. One imagines as a characteristic dialogue of our time an interview in which someone is asking of a vague gracious figure, a kind of Mrs. America: "But while you waited for the Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles what did you *do*?" She answers: "I bought things."

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

She reminds one of the sentinel at Pompeii—a space among ashes, now, but at his post: she too did what she was supposed to do. . . . Our society has delivered us—most of us—from the bonds of necessity, so that we no longer need worry about having food enough to keep from starving, clothing and shelter enough to keep from freezing; yet if the ends for which we work, of which we dream, are restaurants and clothes and houses, consumption, possessions, how have we escaped? We have merely exchanged man's old bondage for a new voluntary one. But *voluntary* is wrong: the consumer is trained for his job of consuming as the factory worker is trained for his job of producing; and the first is a longer, more complicated training, since it is easier to teach a man to handle a tool, to read a dial, than it is to teach him to ask, always, for a name-brand aspirin—to want, someday, a stand-by generator. What is that? You don't know? I used not to know, but the readers of *House Beautiful* all know, and now I know: it is the electrical generator that stands in the basement of the suburban houseowner, shining, silent, until at last one night the lights go out, the freezer's food begins to—

Ah, but it's frozen for good, the lights are on forever; the owner has switched on the stand-by generator.

But you don't see that he really needs the generator, you'd rather have seen him buy a second car? He has two. A second bathroom? He has four. He long ago doubled everything, when the People of the Medium doubled everything; and now that he's gone twice round he will have to wait three years, or four, till both are obsolescent—but while he waits there are so many new needs that he can satisfy, so many things a man can buy.

> Man wants but little here below
> Nor wants that little long,

said the poet; what a lie! Man wants almost unlimited quantities of almost everything, and he wants it till the day he dies.

We sometimes see in *Life* or *Look* a double-page photograph of some family standing on the lawn among its possessions: station wagon, swimming pool, power cruiser, sports car, tape recorder, television sets, radios, cameras, power lawn mower, garden tractor, lathe, barbecue set, sporting equipment, domestic appliances—all the gleaming, grotesquely imaginative paraphernalia of its existence. It was hard to get them on two pages, soon they will need four. It is like a dream, a child's dream before Christmas; yet if the members of the family doubt that they are awake, they have only to reach out

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

and pinch something. The family seems pale and small, a negligible appendage, beside its possessions; only a human being would need to ask, "Which owns which?" We are fond of saying that something-or-other is not just something-or-other but "a way of life"; this too is a way of life—our way, the way.

Emerson, in his spare stony New England, a few miles from Walden, could write:

> Things are in the saddle
> And ride mankind.

He could say more now: that they are in the theater and studio, and entertain mankind; are in the pulpit and preach to mankind. The values of business, in an overwhelmingly successful business society like our own, are reflected in every sphere: values which agree with them are reinforced, values which disagree are cancelled out or have lip-service paid to them. In business what sells is good, and that's the end of it—that is what *good* means; if the world doesn't beat a path to your door, your mousetrap wasn't better. The values of the Medium (which is both a popular business itself and the cause of popularity in other businesses) are business values: money, success, celebrity. If we are representative members of our society, the Medium's values are ours; even when we are unrepresentative, nonconforming, our hands are (too often) subdued to the element they work in, and our unconscious expectations are all that we consciously reject. (Darwin said that he always immediately wrote down evidence against a theory because otherwise, he'd noticed, he would forget it; in the same way we keep forgetting the existence of those poor and unknown failures whom we might rebelliously love and admire.) *If you're so smart why aren't you rich?* is the ground-bass of our society, a grumbling and quite unanswerable criticism, since the society's nonmonetary values *are* directly convertible into money. (Celebrity turns into testimonials, lectures, directorships, presidencies, the capital gains of an autobiography *Told To* some professional ghost who photographs the man's life as Bachrach photographs his body.) When Liberace said that his critics' unfavorable reviews hurt him so much that he cried all the way to the bank, one had to admire the correctness and penetration of his press-agent's wit: in another age, what mightn't such a man have become!

Our culture is essentially periodical: we believe that all that is deserves to perish and to have something else put in its place. We speak of "planned obsolescence," but it is more than planned, it is felt

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

—is an assumption about the nature of the world. The present is better and more interesting, more real, than the past; the future will be better and more interesting, more real, than the present. (But, consciously, we do not hold against the present its prospective obsolescence.) Our standards have become, to an astonishing degree, those of what is called "the world of fashion," where mere timeliness—being orange in orange's year, violet in violet's—is the value to which all other values are reducible. In our society "old-fashioned" is so final a condemnation that a man like Norman Vincent Peale can say about atheism or agnosticism simply that it is old-fashioned; the homely recommendation of "Give me that good old-time religion" has become after a few decades the conclusive rejection of "old-fashioned" atheism.

All this is, at bottom, the opposite of the world of the arts, where commercial and scientific progress do not exist; where the bone of Homer and Mozart and Donatello is there, always, under the mere blush of fashion; where the past—the remote past, even—is responsible for the way that we understand, value, and act in, the present. (When one reads an abstract expressionist's remark that Washington studios are "eighteen months behind" those of his colleagues in New York, one realizes something of the terrible power of business and fashion over those most overtly hostile to them.) An artist's work and life presuppose continuing standards, values stretched out over centuries or millennia, a future that is the continuation and modification of the past, not its contradiction or irrelevant replacement. He is working for the time that wants the best that he can do: the present, he hopes—but if not that, the future. If he sees that fewer and fewer people are any real audience for the serious artists of the past, he will feel that still fewer are going to be an audience for the serious artists of the present, for those who, willingly or unwillingly, sacrifice extrinsic values to intrinsic ones, immediate effectiveness to that steady attraction which, the artist hopes, true excellence will always exert. The past's relation to the artist or man of culture is almost the opposite of its relation to the rest of our society. To him the present is no more than the last ring on the trunk, understandable and valuable only in terms of all the earlier rings. The rest of our society sees only that great last ring, the enveloping surface of the trunk; what's underneath is a disregarded, almost hypothetical foundation. When Northrop Frye writes that "the preoccupation of the humanities with the past is sometimes made a reproach against them by those who forget that we face the past: it may be shadowy, but

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

it is all that is there," he is saying what for the artist or man of culture is self-evidently true; yet for the Medium and the People of the Medium it is as self-evidently false—for them the present (or a past so recent, so quick-changing, so soon-disappearing, that it might be called the specious present) is all that is there.

In the past our culture's frame of reference, its body of common knowledge (its possibility of comprehensible allusion) changed slowly and superficially; the amount added to it or taken away from it in any ten years was a small proportion of the whole. Now in any ten years a surprisingly large proportion of the whole is replaced. Most of the information people have in common is something that four or five years from now they will not even remember having known. A newspaper story remarks in astonishment that television quiz programs have "proved that ordinary citizens can be conversant with such esoterica as jazz, opera, the Bible, Shakespeare, poetry and fisticuffs." You may exclaim, "Esoterica! If the Bible and Shakespeare are esoterica, what is there that's common knowledge?" The answer, I suppose, is that Elfrida von Nardoff and Teddy Nadler (the ordinary citizens on the quiz programs) are common knowledge; though not for long. Songs disappear in two or three months, celebrities in two or three years; most of the Medium is lightly felt and soon forgotten. What is as dead as day-before-yesterday's newspaper, the next-to-the-last number on the roulette wheel? and most of the knowledge we have in common is knowledge of such newspapers, such numbers. But the novelist or poet or dramatist, when he moves a great audience, depends upon the deep feelings, the live unforgotten knowledge, that the people of his culture share; if these have become contingent, superficial, ephemeral, it is disastrous for him.

New products and fashions replace the old, and the fact that they replace them is proof enough of their superiority. Similarly, the Medium does not need to show that the subjects that fill it are timely or interesting or important—the fact that they are its subjects makes them so. If *Time, Life,* and the television shows are full of Tom Fool this month, he's no fool. And when he has been gone from them a while, we do not think him a fool—we do not think of him at all. He no longer exists, in the fullest sense of the word "exist": to be is to be perceived, to be a part of the Medium of our perception. Our celebrities are not kings, romantic in exile, but Representatives who, defeated, are forgotten; they had always only the qualities that we delegated to them.

After driving for four or five minutes along the road outside

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

my door, I come to a long row of one-room shacks about the size of kitchens, made out of used boards, metal signs, old tin roofs. To the people who live in them an electric dishwasher of one's own is as much a fantasy as an ocean liner of one's own. But since the Medium (and those whose thought is molded by it) does not perceive them, these people are themselves a fantasy: no matter how many millions of such exceptions to the general rule there are, they do not really exist, but have a kind of anomalous, statistical subsistence; our moral and imaginative view of the world is no more affected by them than by the occupants of some home for the mentally deficient a little farther along the road. If, some night, one of these outmoded, economically deficient ghosts should scratch at my window, I could say only, "Come back twenty years ago." And if I, as an old-fashioned, one-room poet, a friend of "quiet culture," a "meek lover of the good," should go out some night to scratch at another window, shouldn't I hear someone's indifferent or regretful, "Come back a century or two ago"?

When those whose existence the Medium recognizes ring the chimes of the writer's doorbell, fall through his letter slot, float out onto his television screen, what is he to say to them? A man's unsuccessful struggle to get his family food is material for a work of art—for tragedy, almost; his unsuccessful struggle to get his family a stand-by generator is material for what? Comedy? Farce? Comedy on such a scale, at such a level, that our society and its standards seem, almost, farce? And yet it is the People of the Medium, those who long for and get, or long for and don't get, the generator, whom our culture finds representative, who are there to be treated first of all. And the Medium itself—one of the ends of life, something essential to people's understanding and valuing of their existence, something many of their waking hours are spent listening to or looking at—how is *it* to be treated as subject matter for art? The writer cannot just reproduce it; should he satirize or parody it? But often parody or satire is impossible, since it is already its own parody; and by the time the writer's work is published, the part of the Medium which is satirized will already have been forgotten. Yet isn't the Medium by now an essential part of its watchers? Those whom Mohammedans speak of as the People of the Book are inexplicable, surely, in any terms that omit it; we are people of the magazine, the television set, the radio, and are inexplicable in any terms that omit them.

Oscar Wilde's wittily paradoxical statement about Nature's imitation of Art is literally true when the Nature is human nature and the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Art that of television, radio, motion pictures, popular magazines. Life is so, people are so, the Medium shows its audience, and most of the audience believe it, expect people to be so, try to be so themselves. For them the People of the Medium are reality, what human beings normally, primarily are: and mere local or personal variations are not real in the same sense. The Medium mediates between us and raw reality, and the mediation more and more replaces reality for us. In many homes either the television set or the radio is turned on most of the time the family is awake. (Many radio stations have a news broadcast every half hour, and many people like and need to hear it.) It is as if the people longed to be established in reality, to be reminded continually of the "real," the "objective" world—the created world of the Medium—rather than be left at the mercy of actuality, of the helpless contingency of the world in which the radio receiver or television set is sitting. (And surely we can sympathize: which of us hasn't found a similar refuge in the "real," created world of Cézanne or Goethe or Verdi? Yet Dostoievsky's world is too different from Wordsworth's, Piero della Francesca's from Goya's, Bach's from Hugo Wolf's, for us to be able to substitute one homogeneous mediated reality for everyday reality in the belief that it *is* everyday reality.) The world of events and celebrities and performers, the Great World, has become for many listeners, lookers, readers, the world of primary reality: how many times they have sighed at the colorless unreality of their own lives and families, sighed for the bright reality of, say, Lucille Ball's—of some shadow dyed, gowned, directed, produced, and agented into a being as equivocal as that of the square root of minus one. The watchers call the celebrities by their first names, approve or disapprove of "who they're dating," handle them with a mixture of love, identification, envy, and contempt—for the Medium has given its people so terrible a familiarity with everyone that it takes great magnanimity of spirit not to be affected by it. These celebrities are not heroes to us, their valets.

Better to have these real ones play themselves, and not sacrifice too much of their reality to art; better to have the watcher play himself, and not lose too much of himself in art. Usually the watcher is halfway between two worlds, paying full attention to neither: half distracted from, half distracted by, this distraction—and able for the moment not to be affected too greatly, have too great demands made upon him, by either world. For in the Medium, which we escape to from work, nothing is ever *work*, nothing ever makes intel-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

lectual or emotional or imaginative demands which we might find it difficult to satisfy. Here in the half-world everything is homogeneous —is, as much as possible, the same as everything else: each familiar novelty, novel familiarity, has the same texture on top and the same attitude and conclusion at bottom; only the middle, the particular subject of the particular program or article, is different. (If it *is* different: everyone is given the same automatic "human interest" treatment, so that it is hard for us to remember, unnecessary for us to remember, which particular celebrity we're reading about this time—often it's the same one, we've just moved to a different magazine.) Heine said that the English have a hundred religions and one sauce; so do we; and we are so accustomed to this sauce or dye or style, the aesthetic equivalent of Standard Brands, that a very simple thing can seem perverse, obscure, without it. And, too, we find it hard to have to shift from one art form to another, to vary our attitudes and expectations, to use our unexercised imaginations. Poetry disappeared long ago, even for most intellectuals; each year fiction is a little less important. Our age is an age of nonfiction; of gossip columns, interviews, photographic essays, documentaries; of articles, condensed or book length, spoken or written; of real facts about real people. Art lies to us to tell us the (sometimes disquieting) truth; the Medium tells us truths, facts, in order to make us believe some reassuring or entertaining lie or half truth. These actually existing celebrities, of universally admitted importance, about whom we are told directly authoritative facts—how can fictional characters compete with them? These *are* our fictional characters, our Lears and Clytemnestras. (This is ironically appropriate, since many of their doings and sayings are fictional, made up by public relations officers, columnists, agents, or other affable familiar ghosts.) And the Medium gives us such facts, such photographs, such tape recordings, such clinical reports not only about the great, but also about (representative samples of) the small; when we have been shown so much about so many—*can* be shown, we feel, anything about anybody—does fiction seem so essential as it once seemed? Shakespeare or Tolstoy can show us all about someone, but so can *Life;* and when *Life* does, it's someone real.

The Medium is half life and half art, and competes with both life and art. It spoils its audience for both; spoils both for its audience. For the People of the Medium life isn't sufficiently a matter of success and glamor and celebrity, isn't entertaining enough, distracting enough, *mediated* enough; and art is too difficult or individual or

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

novel, too restrained or indirect, too much a matter of tradition and the past, of special attitudes and aptitudes: its mediation sometimes is queer or excessive, and sometimes is not even recognizable as mediation. The Medium's mixture of rhetoric and reality, which gives people what we know they want in the form we know they like, is something more efficient and irresistible, more habit-forming, than any art. If a man all his life has been fed a sort of combination of marzipan and ethyl alcohol—if eating, to him, is a matter of being knocked unconscious by an ice cream soda—can he, by taking thought, come to prefer a diet of bread and wine, apples and well-water? Will a man who has spent his life watching gladiatorial games come to prefer listening to chamber music? And those who produce the bread and wine and quartets for him—won't they be tempted either to give up producing them, or else to produce a bread that's half sugar, half alcohol, a quartet that ends with the cellist at the violist's bleeding throat?

The Medium represents to the artist all that he has learned not to do: its sure-fire stereotypes seem to him what any true art, true spirit, has had to struggle past on its way to the truth. The artist sees the values and textures of this art substitute replacing those of his art with most of society, conditioning the expectations of what audience he has kept. Any outsider who has worked for the Medium will have noticed that the one thing which seems to its managers most unnatural is for someone to do something naturally, to speak or write as an individual speaking or writing to other individuals, and not as a subcontractor supplying a standardized product to the Medium. It is as if producers, editors, supervisors were particles forming a screen between maker and public, one that will let through only particles of their own size and weight (or, as they say, the public's); as you look into their bland faces, their big horn-rimmed eyes, you despair of Creation itself, which seems for the instant made in their own owl-eyed image. There are so many extrinsic considerations about everything in the work, the maker finds, that by the time it is finished all intrinsic considerations have come to seem secondary. It is no wonder that the professional who writes the ordinary commercial success, the ordinary script, scenario, or article, resembles imaginative writers less than he resembles advertising agents, columnists, editors, and producers. He is a technician who can supply a standard product, a rhetorician who can furnish a regular stimulus for a regular response, what has always made the dog salivate in this situation. He is the opposite of the imaginative artist: instead of

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

stubbornly or helplessly sticking to what he sees and feels, to what seems right for him, true to reality, regardless of what the others think and want, he gives the others what they think and want, regardless of what he himself sees and feels.

Mass culture either corrupts or isolates the writer. His old feeling of oneness, of speaking naturally to an audience with essentially similar standards, is gone; and writers do not any longer have much of the consolatory feeling that took its place, the feeling of writing for the happy few, the kindred spirits whose standards are those of the future. (Today they feel: the future, should there be one, will be worse.) True works of art are more and more produced away from, in opposition to, society. And yet the artist needs society as much as society needs him: as our cultural enclaves get smaller and drier, more hysterical or academic, one mourns for the artists inside them and the public outside. An incomparable historian of mass culture, Ernest van den Haag, has expressed this with laconic force: "The artist who, by refusing to work for the mass market, becomes marginal, cannot create what he might have created had there been no mass market. One may prefer a monologue to addressing a mass meeting. But it is still not a conversation."

Even if the rebellious artist's rebellion is whole-hearted, it can never be whole-stomached, whole-Unconscious'd. Part of him wants to be like his kind, is like his kind; longs to be loved and admired and successful. Our society (and the artist, in so far as he is truly a part of it) has no place set aside for the different and poor and obscure, the fools for Christ's sake: they all go willy-nilly into Limbo. The artist is tempted, consciously, to give his society what it wants, or if he won't or can't, to give it nothing at all; is tempted, unconsciously, to give it superficially independent or contradictory works which are at heart works of the Medium. (Tennessee Williams' *Sweet Bird of Youth* is far less like Chekhov than it is like Mickey Spillane.) It is hard to go on serving both God and Mammon when God is so really ill-, Mammon so really well-organized. Shakespeare wrote for the Medium of his day; if Shakespeare were alive now he'd be writing *My Fair Lady*; isn't *My Fair Lady*, then, our *Hamlet*? shouldn't you be writing *Hamlet* instead of sitting there worrying about your superego? I need my *Hamlet*! So society speaks to the artist; but after he has written it its *Hamlet*, it tries to make sure that he will never do it again. There are more urgent needs that it wants him to satisfy: to lecture to it; to make public appearances; to be interviewed; to be on television shows; to give testimonials; to

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

make trips abroad for the State Department; to judge books for contests or Book Clubs; to read for publishers, judge for publishers, be a publisher for publishers; to be an editor; to teach writing at colleges or writers' conferences; to write scenarios or scripts or articles, articles about his home town for *Holiday,* about cats or clothes or Christmas for *Vogue,* about "How I Wrote *Hamlet*" for anything; to . . .

But why go on? I once heard a composer, lecturing, say to a poet, lecturing: "They'll pay us to do *anything,* so long as it isn't writing music or writing poems." I knew the reply that, as a member of my society, I should have made: "So long as they pay you, what do you care?" But I didn't make it—it was plain that they cared. . . . But how many more learn not to care, love what they once endured! It is a whole so comprehensive that any alternative seems impossible, any opposition irrelevant; in the end a man says in a small voice, "I accept the Medium." The Enemy of the People winds up as the People—but where there is no Enemy, the people perish.

The climate of our culture is changing. Under these new rains, new suns, small things grow great, and what was great grows small; whole species disappear and are replaced. The American present is very different from the American past: so different that our awareness of the extent of the changes has been repressed, and we regard as ordinary what is extraordinary (ominous perhaps) both for us and the rest of the world. For the American present is many other peoples' future: our cultural and economic example is, to much of the world, mesmeric, and it is only its weakness and poverty that prevent it from hurrying with us into the Roman future. Yet at this moment of our greatest power and success, our thought and art are full of troubled gloom, of the conviction of our own decline. When the President of Yale University writes that "the ideal of the good life has faded from the educational process, leaving only miscellaneous prospects of jobs and joyless hedonism," are we likely to find it unfaded among our entertainers and executives? Is the influence of what I have called the Medium likely to make us lead any good life? to make us love and try to attain any real excellence, beauty, magnanimity? or to make us understand these as obligatory but transparent rationalizations, behind which the realities of money and power are waiting?

Matthew Arnold once spoke about our green culture in terms that have an altered relevance (but are not yet irrelevant) to our ripe one. He said: "What really dissatisfies in American civilization is

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the want of the *interesting*, a want due chiefly to the want of those two great elements of the interesting, which are elevation and beauty." This use of *interesting* (and, perhaps, this tone of a curator pointing out what is plain and culpable) shows how far along in the decline of the West Arnold came; it is only in the latter days that we ask to be interested. He had found the word in Carlyle. Carlyle is writing to a friend to persuade him not to emigrate to the United States; he asks, "Could you banish yourself from all that is interesting to your mind, forget the history, the glorious institutions, the noble principles of old Scotland—that you might eat a better dinner, perhaps?" We smile, and feel like reminding Carlyle of the history, the glorious institutions, the noble principles of new America, that New World which is, after all, the heir of the Old. And yet . . . Can we smile as comfortably, today, as we could have smiled yesterday? listen as unconcernedly, if on taking leave of us some tourist should say, with the penetration and obtuseness of his kind:

I remember reading somewhere: that which you inherit from your fathers you must earn in order to possess. I have been so much impressed with your power and possessions that I have neglected, perhaps, your principles. The elevation or beauty of your spirit did not equal, always, that of your mountains and skyscrapers: it seems to me that your society provides you with "all that is interesting to your mind" only exceptionally, at odd hours, in little reservations like those of your Indians. But as for your dinners, I've never seen anything like them: your daily bread comes *flambé*. And yet—wouldn't you say?—the more dinners a man eats, the more comfort he possesses, the hungrier and more uncomfortable some part of him becomes: inside every fat man there is a man who is starving. Part of you is being starved to death, and the rest of you is being stuffed to death. . . . But this will change: no one goes on being stuffed to death or starved to death forever.

This is a gloomy, an equivocal conclusion? Oh yes, I come from an older culture, where things are accustomed to coming to such conclusions; where there is no last-paragraph fairy to bring one, always, a happy ending—or that happiest of all endings, no ending at all. And have I no advice to give you, as I go? None. You are too successful to need advice, or to be able to take it if it were offered; but if ever you should fail, it is there waiting for you, the advice or consolation of all the other failures.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

JAMES BALDWIN

Mass Culture and the Creative Artist

Some Personal Notes

SOMEONE once said to me that the people in general cannot bear very much reality. He meant by this that they prefer fantasy to a truthful re-creation of their experience. The Italians, for example, during the time that De Sica and Rossellini were revitalizing the Italian cinema industry, showed a marked preference for Rita Hayworth vehicles; the world in which she moved across the screen was like a fairy tale, whereas the world De Sica was describing was one with which they were only too familiar. (And it can be suggested perhaps that the Americans who stood in line for *Shoe Shine* and *Open City* were also responding to images which they found exotic, to a reality by which they were not threatened. What passes for the appreciation of serious effort in this country is very often nothing more than an inability to take anything very seriously.)

Now, of course the people cannot bear very much reality, if by this one means their ability to respond to high intellectual or artistic endeavor. I have never in the least understood why they should be expected to. There is a division of labor in the world—as I see it—and the people have quite enough reality to bear, simply getting through their lives, raising their children, dealing with the eternal conundrums of birth, taxes, and death. They do not do this with all the wisdom, foresight, or charity one might wish; nevertheless, this is what they are always doing and it is what the writer is always describing. There is literally nothing else to describe. This effort at description is itself extraordinarily arduous, and those who are driven to make this effort are by virtue of this fact somewhat removed from the people. It happens, by no means infrequently, that the people hound or stone them to death. They then build

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

statues to them, which does not mean that the next artist will have it any easier.

I am not sure that the cultural level of the people is subject to a steady rise: in fact, quite unpredictable things happen when the bulk of the population attains what we think of as a high cultural level, i.e., pre-World War II Germany, or present-day Sweden. And this, I think, is because the effort of a Schönberg or a Picasso (or a William Faulkner or an Albert Camus) has nothing to do, at bottom, with physical comfort, or indeed with comfort of any other kind. But the aim of the people who rise to this high cultural level—who rise, that is, into the middle class—is precisely comfort for the body and the mind. The artistic objects by which they are surrounded cannot possibly fulfill their original function of disturbing the peace —which is still the only method by which the mind can be improved —they bear witness instead to the attainment of a certain level of economic stability and a certain thin measure of sophistication. But art and ideas come out of the passion and torment of experience; it is impossible to have a real relationship to the first if one's aim is to be protected from the second.

We cannot possibly expect, and should not desire, that the great bulk of the populace embark on a mental and spiritual voyage for which very few people are equipped and which even fewer have survived. They have, after all, their indispensable work to do, even as you and I. What we are distressed about, and should be, when we speak of the state of mass culture in this country, is the overwhelming torpor and bewilderment of the people. The people who run the mass media are not all villains and they are not all cowards —though I agree, I must say, with Dwight Macdonald's forceful suggestion that many of them are not very bright. (Why should they be? They, too, have risen from the streets to a high level of cultural attainment. They, too, are positively afflicted by the world's highest standard of living and what is probably the world's most bewilderingly empty way of life.) But even those who are bright are handicapped by their audience: I am less appalled by the fact that *Gunsmoke* is produced than I am by the fact that so many people want to see it. In the same way, I must add, that a thrill of terror runs through me when I hear that the favorite author of our President is Zane Grey.

But one must make a living. The people who run the mass media and those who consume it are really in the same boat. They must continue to produce things they do not really admire, still less, love,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

in order to continue buying things they do not really want, still less, need. If we were dealing only with fintails, two-tone cars, or programs like *Gunsmoke*, the situation would not be so grave. The trouble is that serious things are handled (and received) with the same essential lack of seriousness.

For example: neither *The Bridge On the River Kwai* nor *The Defiant Ones*, two definitely superior movies, can really be called serious. They are extraordinarily interesting and deft: but their principal effort is to keep the audience at a safe remove from the experience which these films are not therefore really prepared to convey. The kind of madness sketched in *Kwai* is far more dangerous and widespread than the movie would have us believe. As for *The Defiant Ones*, its suggestion that Negroes and whites can learn to love each other if they are only chained together long enough runs so madly counter to the facts that it must be dismissed as one of the latest, and sickest, of the liberal fantasies, even if one does not quarrel with the notion that love on such terms is desirable. These movies are designed not to trouble, but to reassure; they do not reflect reality, they merely rearrange its elements into something we can bear. They also weaken our ability to deal with the world as it is, ourselves as we are.

What the mass culture really reflects (as is the case with a "serious" play like *J.B.*) is the American bewilderment in the face of the world we live in. We do not seem to want to know that we are *in* the world, that we are subject to the same catastrophes, vices, joys, and follies which have baffled and afflicted mankind for ages. And this has everything to do, of course, with what was expected of America: which expectation, so generally disappointed, reveals something we do not want to know about sad human nature, reveals something we do not want to know about the intricacies and inequities of any social structure, reveals, in sum, something we do not want to know about ourselves. The American way of life has failed—to make people happier or to make them better. We do not want to admit this, and we do not admit it. We persist in believing that the empty and criminal among our children are the result of some miscalculation in the formula (which can be corrected), that the bottomless and aimless hostility which makes our cities among the most dangerous in the world is created, and felt, by a handful of aberrants, that the lack, yawning everywhere in this country, of passionate conviction, of personal authority, proves only our rather appealing tendency to be gregarious and democratic. We are very

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

cruelly trapped between what we would like to be, and what we actually are. And we cannot possibly become what we would like to be until we are willing to ask ourselves just why the lives we lead on this continent are mainly so empty, so tame and so ugly.

This is a job for the creative artist—who does not really have much to do with mass culture, no matter how many of us may be interviewed on TV. Perhaps life is not the black, unutterably beautiful, mysterious, and lonely thing the creative artist tends to think of it as being; but it is certainly not the sunlit playpen in which so many Americans lose first their identities and then their minds.

I feel very strongly, though, that this amorphous people are in desperate search for something which will help them to re-establish their connection with themselves, and with one another. This can only begin to happen as the truth begins to be told. We are in the middle of an immense metamorphosis here, a metamorphosis which will, it is devoutly to be hoped, rob us of our myths and give us our history, which will destroy our attitudes and give us back our personalities. The mass culture, in the meantime, can only reflect our chaos: and perhaps we had better remember that this chaos contains life—and a great transforming energy.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

STANLEY EDGAR HYMAN

Ideals, Dangers, and Limitations of Mass Culture

I SHALL ASSUME that we all know what mass culture is, and that we all more or less agree that its technological revolution is the major transformation that has happened to the arts (including literature, the art I profess) in our lifetime. I should like to discuss some of the ideals, dangers, and limitations of mass culture. In my opinion, the most important ideal is pluralism, making a wide variety of aesthetic goods available, rather than lifting us all half an inch by the great collective bootstrap. That is why paperbacks and long-playing records seem so hopeful a tendency despite their defects: *Peyton Place* and *Witch Doctor* are available in their millions, but *Finnegans Wake* and *Don Giovanni* (not to speak of *Fat Mama Blues*) are available in their thousands. Even the magazine situation is dreary and discouraging but still triumphantly pluralist; there is a magazine, however tiny, subsidized, or absurd, to publish every kind of writing, to furnish any sort of reading or looking (within the limits of the law) that any few readers or lookers want. One has only to compare the situation with that of England, which has one little magazine to every fifty of ours, or of Russia, which has not had one since Mayakovsky's day, to see the virtues of pluralism. It is only when the expenses of production become prohibitive, with a newspaper or film company, a radio or television station, that a wide variety of aesthetic goods becomes impossible, and only ventures that will satisfy many thousands or millions are feasible. Then it is necessary to talk of improving standards, raising levels, educating public taste, taking the initiative for better quality, and such functions more proper to a benign tyranny than to our anarchic cultural democracy.

The second ideal, about which I am somewhat more dubious but

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

still hopeful, is the natural evolution of taste, given a variety of possibilities. (In other words, it depends on pluralism, although pluralism, as a good in itself, would make sense even if taste were known to be static.) This is the assumption that a certain number of those who read and enjoy *The Subterraneans* will go on to read, and prefer, *The Possessed*; that some will comparably graduate from rock 'n roll to traditional blues. This naturally happens at school age (although not in every case), and the ideal assumes its happening at every age. Here the evidence is rather mixed. William Phillips, in an article in the *Partisan Review* (Winter 1959) describes the question as "the old senseless argument about whether a man who listens to popular tunes has taken the first step to Schönberg." This may, however, be a very important question for the future of our culture.

A decade ago the Book-of-the-Month Club sent around a circular listens to popular tunes has taken the first step to Schönberg." This It clearly made the point (which I do not think it was designed to make) that these had worsened annually, from books like Sylvia Townsend Warner's *Lolly Willowes* and Elinor Wylie's *Orphan Angel* in 1926 to Frances Gaither's *Double Muscadine* and the Gilbreths' *Cheaper by the Dozen* in 1949. Over the decade since, despite (or because of) the presence of such learned fellows as Gilbert Highet on the board of judges, the selections seem to have continued to deteriorate. If someone had subscribed and taken the selections over the past thirty years, *his* taste would not have evolved onward and upward. But the turnover is very high; how could we find out about those who learned to read books for pleasure as subscribers, then resigned from the club to read better books on their own?

The BBC radio, with its three programs designed for three levels of taste, would seem a perfect device for encouraging this sort of cultural mobility. Yet I wonder what percentage of listeners of mature years graduated from family comedy on the Light to sea chanteys on the Home to translations of Bulgarian poetry on the Third? How many slid slowly downward? Now, unfortunately, the Third has been curtailed, and with the increased cost of television production and a competing commercial channel, it has not been possible for the BBC to set up anything of the sort for television. Here for the first time some planned range of availability was created in a mass medium, but we know too little about its cultural results.

The third ideal of mass culture I take from a letter Patrick D.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Hazard wrote to me in 1958 in connection with some remarks I had published about the ironic mode. He wrote: "Now it seems to me that a great many intellectuals in America have achieved a viable irony, but I wonder how the great mass who are no longer folk and not yet people can find a footing for their ironic stance. Do any of the following seem to you footholds?" He then proceeded to list such newer comic performers as Mort Sahl and Jonathan Winters, such older comic performers as Groucho Marx and Fred Allen, and such miscellaneous phenomena as Al Capp, *The Threepenny Opera*, and *Humbug* magazine. His comment on the list was: "These things seem to question in one way or another some aspect of flatulence in popular culture, its sentimentality, fake elegance, phony egalitarianism, or its perennial playpen atmosphere."

I did not know the answer to the question then and do not know it now, but I present Hazard's question and comment to raise the possibility of a third ideal. This is that mass culture throws up its own criticism, in performers of insight, wit, and talent, and in forms of irony and satire, to enable some of the audience to break through it into a broader or deeper set of aesthetic values. Again, I much prefer this sort of evolutionary possibility to types of patronizing enlightenment. We do well to be wary when a *Time* editor like Thomas Griffith writes *The Waist-High Culture* to ask whether we haven't sold our souls "for a mess of pottage that goes snap, crackle, and pop," or television producer David Susskind tells *Life*:

> I'm an intellectual who cares about television. There are some good things on it, tiny atolls in the oceans of junk. . . . You get mad at what you really care about—like your wife. I'm mad at TV because I really love it and it's lousy. It's a very beautiful woman who looks abominable. The only way to fix it is to clean out the pack who are running it and put in some brainy guys.

We assume that if Griffith ran *Time* it would crackle less, that Susskind is the sort of brainy lover TV needs. I would sooner rest my hopes in Groucho Marx, who does not describe himself as an intellectual, or the late Fred Allen, who had a cleansing bitterness and despair about the media themselves, and wasn't campaigning for David Sarnoff's job. If there are such footings as Hazard suggests for an ironic stance in mass culture, let them not crusade under our feet.

The dangers of mass culture are much easier to define than the ideas. The foremost one, which may negate all the ideals, is an overpowering narcotic effect, relaxing the tired mind and tranquilizing

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the anxious. Genuine art is demanding and difficult, often unpleasant, nagging at the mind and stretching the nerves taut. So much of mass culture envelops the audience in a warm bath, making no demands except that we all glow with pleasure and comfort. It is this that may negate the range of possibility (the bath is pleasanter at the shallow end), keep taste static or even deteriorate it a little, muffle the few critical and ironic sounds being made. That premature cultural critic Homer knew all about this effect, at various times calling it Lotus Eaters, Calypso, Circe, and the Sirens, and he just barely got our hero through intact.

An obvious source of danger is the cults. In one direction we have the cult of the folk. Some ten years ago I published an article called "The American Folksy" in *Theatre Arts* (April 1949), protesting that we were being overwhelmed by an avalanche of pseudo-folk corn. I turn out not to have been very prophetic. What I then took to be the height of something like the great tulip craze can now be seen to have been only the first tentative beginnings of something so vast and offensive that it dwarfs historical parallels. I named half a dozen folksy singers of the time, but could not have guessed that a decade later there would be hundreds if not thousands, that magazines would be devoted to guitar and banjo styles, that the production of washtub basses would be an American industry. I certainly could not have predicted Elvis Presley. I mention this failure of imagination now only to explain why the ramifying vertical combine that lives by falsifying America's cultural past seems to me a major deterrent to any of the hopes for mass culture.

Opposed to the cult of the folk, which identifies (however falsely) with a tradition, and blows hot, or passionate, is the cult of the hip which denies (however falsely) having any tradition, and blows cool. (At the juvenile end it tells sick jokes, glorying in the impassivity of: "Mrs. Brown, can Johnny come out and play ball?" "But you children know he has no arms or legs." "That's O.K. We want to use him for second base.") At higher levels it admits wryly to Jules Feiffer's truths, professes Zen, or joins Norman Mailer in making what he called in *Dissent*,* "the imaginative journey into the tortured marijuana-racked mind and genitalia of a hipster daring to live on the edge of the most dangerous of the Negro worlds." At this point, obviously, cool has become pretty hot, an outlaw folk

* "The White Negro (Superficial Reflections on the Hipster)," *Dissent*, Summer 1957, 4:276-293.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tradition has been established, and perhaps both these polar cults are recognizable as the same sort of fantasy identification. To the extent that mass culture permits, encourages, and thrives on these adolescent gratifications, it is as spurious and mendacious as its harshest critics claim.

One more danger inherent in mass culture, and perhaps the most menacing one, is the existence of a captive audience with no escape. In regard to art, it is not much of a problem; many will sit through worse than they expected, and a few will sit through better than they desire. As a machinery for selling us consumer goods, using all the resources of a prostituted psychology and sociology, it becomes more menacing, although here too mass culture seems to throw up its counterstatements. Against a million voices stridently shouting "Buy!" the tiny neo-Thoreauvian voice of J. K. Galbraith whispers, "Reduce your wants," and is immediately amplified by a book club and blurbs from a number of magazines that would not last a week if his advice were heeded. It is when the same technique is used to sell us politics that our status as a captive audience to mass media becomes menacing, an Eisenhower or a Nixon today but a Big Brother or a Big Daddy tomorrow.

At this point we are informed that the fashionable cult of New Conservatism, with its scorn for our worship of the mob and the mob's brittle toys, will save us, if only we elect to follow Burke and Calhoun instead of those demagogues Jefferson and Paine. The corrective here is reading the tribute to Roy Campbell that Russell Kirk published in *The Sewanee Review* (Winter 1956) and discovering that Kirk's heart's vision is not Edmund Burke orating nobly in the House of Commons, but Roy Campbell spanking a small, effeminate Marxist poet on a public lecture platform. In short, New Conservatism yearns masochistically for its fantasy storm troopers, and Kirk and his fellows are less the doctor than the disease.

Some of the limitations of mass culture have already been suggested. One absolute limitation is the Law of Raspberry Jam, that the wider you spread it the thinner it is. Another is the nature of art itself. As genuine art, advancing sensibility, stretching the limits of form, purifying the language of the tribe, it is always for an elite of education (which does not mean a formal education), sensibility, and taste. When its freshness has grown somewhat stale, diluted by imitators and popularizers, its audience widens, although if it is true art it will always continue to demand more than a mass audience cares to give it.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

A special limitation, not inevitable and not universal, is the timidity of those in positions of authority in the mass media. Jerry Lewis, of all people, wrote in the *New York Times Magazine* for 7 December 1958:

> Unfortunately, TV fell into the well-manicured hands of the Madison Avenue bully boys, who, awed by the enormousness of the monster, began to "run scared." They were easy prey for the new American weapon —the pressure group.

Steve Allen's reply in the same symposium suggests that we confront no simple matter of pressure or censorship, that here horses break themselves with alacrity and great civic responsibility. Allen writes:

> There are, frankly, a few things I joke about in private that I do not touch upon on the air, but this implies no feeling of frustration. I realize that some tenets of my personal philosophy would antagonize the majority without educating them; hence, no good could come of experimenting with such subjects.

Matching the timidity of the producers is the ignorance of the consumers. Who knows what they might want if they knew what there was to want, if they knew what they didn't know? This again is a special and perhaps transitory limitation. As education spreads and leisure increases, some of our mass audiences may acquire, if not what we call "taste," at least a wider knowledge of cultural possibility. The well poisoner is an unlovely figure, but the responsibility of those poisoning *these* reservoirs from which millions drink is comparably greater. What defense has an ignorant and eager reader, buying *The Origin of Species* in the Everyman edition, against its introductory assurance that authoritative scientists no longer believe these things? He has scarcely heard of Darwin, how is he to know that W. R. Thompson is not the voice of modern science? If he happens to read T. H. Robsjohn-Gibbings' book attacking modern architecture and design, it is the confession of a contemporary designer to what he has always rather suspected; he is not apt to have encountered Mr. Robsjohn-Gibbings' hi-fi unit with Doric columns in a decorator's studio. Because it knows no better, in short, the mass audience is condemned to the fate of never knowing any better.

We come finally to the matter of taking a stand or stands. Each of us confronts mass culture in a number of roles. My own include customer, parent, journalist, critic, teacher of literature. The role of

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

teacher seems the best one from which to tackle the problem, since the college teacher of literature is not only assumed to be a custodian of traditional values, but must deal with the new values in his day-to-day contact with what students read and write. He cannot entirely ignore them or wash his hands of them. I would propose that there are at least six different things he must do about mass culture, varying with the quality and promise of the specimen involved, the differing needs of students, and his own needs and perhaps moods. I list them by the operative verbs, using literary examples as much as possible.

Reject. This is a traditional function of the critic of mass culture, and it can be performed in a variety of moods, from the high good fun of H. L. Mencken whacking one or another fatuosity of the booboisie to the owlish pomposity of recent *American Mercury* pundits. The best current example of rejection is Leslie Fiedler, who told a symposium at Columbia not long ago that the writer's proper role is a nay-saying and destructive one, that he should not hesitate to bite the hand which feeds him. Fiedler's slogan for Hollywood and TV was, "We must destroy their destructiveness." As a teacher, I would reserve this rejection for the real junk, Mickey Spillane and *Peyton Place.* Here, it seems to me, any sort of undercutting or resistance is legitimate, short of actually snatching the book out of the student's hands and pitching it into the garbage. Let the teacher rant and rave, appeal to his authority, the student's shame, or the ghost of Henry James. Let him expose and deride this pernicious trash in every way possible. The really hopeless is only a small percentage of the total output of mass culture, however, which allows the teacher to save some of his energy for other operations, and to contribute a small sum to a subscription to replace Leslie Fiedler's teeth when they wear out.

Embrace. This too is a traditional function, and we have had intellectual cults of the popular arts, of Chaplin or Keaton, Krazy Kat or Donald Duck, since there were popular arts. Reuel Denney's article on Pogo, reprinted in his book, *The Astonished Muse,* is a fine example of the passionate professorial embrace. Denney shows learnedly that the strip is "a study in the disintegration of the New Deal phase of the Democratic party," that "if the political stance of the strip is Democratic and Steffens-like, the literary stance is post-Joycean, and the psychological stance is post-Freudian." Poor Albert Alligator becomes a parataxis of oral aggression, although at this point I begin to suspect that Denney is having a pull at the

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

reader's leg. It was very shrewd of George P. Elliott to make his impossible sociologist in *Parktilden Village* the creator, as the result of his researches, of a cartoon strip that appealed to every cultural level. George Orwell was in something of this position, studying boys' books with loving attention, then himself writing a superior boys' book in *1984,* which sold its million copies in paperback. The products of mass culture one can wholeheartedly welcome and embrace are probably as small a percentage as those one ought wholeheartedly to reject. I would suggest such rare best-sellers as *Catcher in the Rye,* hovering on the edge of serious literature, such sparkling musical comedies as *Guys and Dolls* and *Pajama Game,* and comedians and comic strips to taste.

Ignore. This is perhaps more a teacher's dodge than any other. Several years ago at Bennington, David Riesman made some remarks (which I dare say he has since published) about the tyranny of the curricular. When he was an undergraduate, he said, his intellectual solace was that he could read Marx and Freud, which *they* (his teachers) didn't know about or didn't approve, and thus have an area of his mind and life that Harvard could not regiment. At a place like Bennington, he said, Marx and Freud would immediately be made the subject of courses, as would anything else in which the students showed interest.

I sat in the audience trying to get the arrow out of my throat, since that year I was teaching a course in Marx and Freud (along with Darwin and Frazer), and I had just organized a lively faculty seminar on rock 'n roll, at which we told the students what it was all about. The only comfort I had was that however tyrannous the curricular, there was always *something* the students could block off privately; if they were being taught Marx and "Fats" Domino, perhaps they were pursuing Racine and Mozart on the sly. In any case, they had some underground culture the faculty would do best not to know about. I find this tactic of ignoring very useful in regard to West Coast poetry (I suspect that that book of verse called *Howl* circulates surreptitiously at Bennington, but I have never made any attempt to find out), in regard to the intricacies of modern cool jazz ("He doesn't dig *Mulligan*!"), and most particularly in regard to any combination of the two. Probably I would be better off, we would all be better off, ignoring more, letting them keep private whatever current work speaks to their condition, letting education grow up without daily watering and all those infernal sunlamps.

Improve. Here we have the traditional pedagogic tactic of using

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

what the student likes as a guidepost to something better. Ah, one can sigh in relief, at last some *constructive* criticism, not that irresponsible ignoring. It is this attitude of exploring mass culture for signs of hope and maturity that has distinguished *Commentary* over the years. I think of such articles as Robert Warshow's "Paul, the Horror Comics, and Dr. Wertham," reprinted in Rosenberg and White's *Mass Culture*, and Norman Podhoretz's "Our Changing Ideals, as Seen on TV," reprinted in Brossard's *The Scene before You*. A sign of the awareness of the problem by a group of English teachers is the recent organization of a new section of the Modern Language Association, dealing with Literature and General Culture. An organizing statement that was circulated before the meeting expressed the hope that by studying mass culture "we may come to learn what clearly separates the best-seller from the work of distinction, and, if our aims become in part educational, offer our students the necessary exercises in discrimination." Again, I am wary of the big battalions. Teaching this sort of discrimination has always been the teacher's function, as it has always been the critic's. The works that call for it are those mixed bundles that cannot be rejected or embraced and should not be ignored, works of genuine imagination flawed by crassness, hokum, or sheer want of craft. I think of the novels of Jack Kerouac and the plays of Tennessee Williams. What attracts the student or reader to them is better available in Dostoevsky and Chekhov, in Fielding and Shakespeare, but they may be precisely the bridges to get there, and in any case are worth study in their own terms.

Replace. Beyond all this, the college teacher of literature as a custodian of traditional value has to remember what he has in his custody. John Crowe Ransom, in his 1958 Phi Beta Kappa address, "Our Age among the Ages," reprinted in the *Kenyon Review* (Winter 1959), came to a civilized and pluralist but deeply pessimistic conclusion. He wrote:

> At any rate, the old ways of life have been disappearing much too rapidly for comfort, and we are in a great cultural confusion. Many millions of underprivileged persons now have income and leisure which they did not have before. They have the means to achieve the best properties of a culture, if they know how to spend their money wisely. And it is a fact that they spend handsomely on education. Now, I am in the education business, and I can report my own observations on that. It is as if a sudden invasion of barbarians had overrun the educational institution; except that the barbarians in this case are our neighbors and friends, and sometimes they are our own children, or they are ourselves,

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

they are some of us gathered here on this very fine occasion. We should not fear them; they are not foreigners, nor our enemies. But in the last resort education is a democratic process, in which the courses are subject to the election of the applicants, and a course even when it has been elected can never rise above the intellectual passion of its pupils, or their comparative indifference. So, with the new generation of students, Milton declines in the curriculum; even Shakespeare has lost heavily; Homer and Virgil are practically gone. The literary interest of the students today is ninety percent in the literature of their own age; more often than not it is found in books which do not find entry into the curriculum, and are beneath the standard which your humble servants, the teachers of literature, are trying to maintain. Chaucer and Spenser and Milton, with their respective contemporaries, will have their secure existence henceforth in the library, and of course in the love and intimate acquaintance of a certain academic community, and there they will stay except for possible periods when there is a revival of the literature of our own antiquity. Our literary culture for a long time is going to exist in a sprawling fashion, with minority pockets of old-style culture, and some sort of a majority culture of a new and indeterminate style. It is a free society, and I should expect that the rights of minorities will be as secure as the rights of individuals.

Ransom's prediction may be exactly accurate, yet the teacher cannot reconcile himself to a minority status for his values in his own classroom, however reconciled he is to it everywhere else. He must ceaselessly bring to the attention of his students the greatest literature he knows. It is not easy for an ill-educated man to teach Homer and Virgil, Greek drama and the Bible, Milton and Shakespeare, as I can testify, but it is essential, and in our curricula Darwin and Marx, ballads and blues, must have a place, but not the primary place. "The best that has been thought and known," as Arnold somewhat pompously put it, is even more vital for college students these days when they seem to come already knowing the worst.

Warn. Here the teacher as critic of mass culture needs a good stout voice, along with the prescience of Ortega y Gasset and the bitterness of Randolph Bourne. The evidence, from Q. D. Leavis' *Fiction and the Reading Public* in 1939 to Margaret Dalziel's *Popular Fiction 100 Years Ago* in 1959, suggests that in some significant respects the standards of mass culture are deteriorating over the centuries, and that instead of flying the kites of our hopes for evolution and awakening, we had better dig in and try to keep things from getting worse than the Victorian penny dreadful. The notable voice here is Randall Jarrell's, and in "The Appalling Taste of Our Age" in the *Saturday Evening Post*'s Adventures of the Mind series, he warned us in the most violent terms that the digest and the revised

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

simplified version menace not only high literary culture but the art of reading itself, the use of the written word. In the most terrifying chapter of *Das Kapital*, "The Working Day," Marx told us of English laboring children so brutalized and degraded by working twelve and sixteen hours a day in the mills that they did not know the name of the Queen, or the story of Noah, or where London was. Now Jarrell tells us of our own children, raised in comfort and love, getting the most expensive education in the world, who do not know who Charlemagne was, or the story of Jonah, or what comes before E in the alphabet. Warn? One should bellow and curse and call down doom, like the prophet Jeremiah.

Yes, but of course also reject and embrace, ignore, improve, and replace. The teacher and the critic of mass culture cannot simply reduce himself to one attitude, but must keep varying the attack, like a young pitcher learning to supplement his high-school fast ball with a curve and a change of pace. Among the dangers of mass culture is the danger to the critic of atrophy, not to call it *rigor mortis*, of hardening in one fixed position. The comparable danger to the writer or artist is being squeezed dry too fast, like a television comedian, or brought up into the big time too soon, like a young fighter. The defense in both cases is wariness, and periodic rites of withdrawal. The ultimate ideal of mass culture is the ideal of the whole culture (to return to the anthropologists' term), something nearer the good life for all mankind. Here Homer and the Athenian tragic dramatists are useful in reminding us of basic limitation, of man's flawed, blind, and mortal nature, and of the ironies of hope and expectation.

We are not the good society, but we do have a vision of it, and that vision is a pluralist one, in which many different forms of satisfaction, including clearly spurious ones, can coexist peacefully. Mass culture is here to stay, but so, I hope, are those of us who want another sort of culture for ourselves and for anyone else who wants it, or who can be educated, led, or cajoled into wanting it. In so far as all of mass culture represents someone's organization of experience into what he intends as meaningful and pleasurable patterns, it is all a kind of shabby poetry, but we dare not forget that there are other kinds of poetry too.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

H. STUART HUGHES

Mass Culture and Social Criticism

CONTEMPORARY CRITICS of mass culture have gotten themselves into inextricable difficulties by refusing to admit to their own "snobbery." The original critics of the phenomenon, from de Tocqueville to Ortega y Gasset and Irving Babbitt, were frankly aristocrats who never thought of apologizing for the special and exclusive nature of their own standards. Indeed, it was precisely the fastidious distaste of the well born and the carefully educated that prompted the identification of mass culture at all. Culturally privileged elites have always resisted the invasion of the vulgar; there was no particular novelty in the fact that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries people of humanistic education reacted so sharply against the unfamiliar standards of the "half-educated." The novelty appeared only when (as Edward Shils[1] has explained) the intellectual leaders began to identify themselves with democracy or socialism and sought virtue in the cultural pursuits of the common man. From this latter point of departure, a bewildered disappointment could be the only result.

For our contemporary critics have been trying to apply two incompatible standards at the same time. They have clung to the special cultural definitions of a narrow elite—the insistence on a common core of "humanist" reading or artistic enjoyment, on the importance of foreign languages, ancient or modern, and on the elegant manipulation of one's own—maintaining all the while that these things are perfectly capable of mass dissemination. They have tried to combine elitism and democracy—things compatible perhaps in a Periclean or Jeffersonian sense of popular government led by "the best," but, under contemporary conditions, radical opposites.

In a word, I believe that contemporary democracy and contemporary mass culture are two sides of the same coin, and that our discussions of the latter phenomenon, now and in the future, will

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

get nowhere until we recognize this simple equation and the corollaries that stem from it. Few of us, I think, would be prepared to jettison democracy and to substitute some sort of aristocratic regime in its place. All sorts of reasons, both moral and technical, spring to our minds as counter-arguments. Hence, if we want to live in our world with some degree of equanimity, it is incumbent on us to make our peace with mass culture in at least a few of its more bearable manifestations.

By now it should be obvious that I agree with Messrs. Rosten and Shils that the mass media cannot be held responsible for "corrupting" popular taste. The taste of the masses, I believe, has always appeared more or less "corrupt" to the better educated, and I see no reason why this situation should change. I am also impressed with Mr. Rosten's argument that the media frequently produce or print things that are over the heads of their audience, and that the most serious limitation on them is the absence of talent to cope with the totally unprecedented demand for copy. At the same time (even under the most favorable conditions) I do not believe the media capable of performing the task of general education that their would-be reformers want to entrust to them. Or, more precisely, I think that only certain cultural values are susceptible of large-scale dissemination, and that certain other values, traditionally regarded as distinguishing features of the educated man, when subjected to such a process simply become diluted beyond recognition.

About twenty years ago I was first struck by Henry Adams' observation that the United States in 1800 possessed a cultural equipment that was almost exclusively restricted to theology, literature, and oratory. While these were frequently cultivated with intensity and finesse, the realm of the visual arts and music (the more sensuous gratifications of old Europe) were practically nonexistent.[2] As the years have passed since I first read those lines—and as our country has undergone the most profound social and cultural change in its history—I have watched Adams' words turn into their very opposite. Today it is the arts of language that have passed into disrespect: even the man of reasonable education can no longer handle English with any sureness of touch; we have become a nation of nongrammarians admirably represented by the curious syntax of our chief executive. At the same time, the enjoyment of music, the semi-professional theater, and even painting has become diffused in a fashion almost nobody anticipated a generation ago. The arts of sensuous consumption are prospering everywhere. In the sphere of

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

traditional music and the less difficult forms of the drama and the visual arts, popular taste has never been so well developed.

Now what the arts of sensuous consumption have in common (as opposed to reading, speaking, logical argument, or the more intellectualized forms of painting or music) is, of course, the passivity of their reception. This passive quality has been lamented again and again by the critics of our contemporary culture; they have repeatedly called for a return to the strenuous effort that they find characteristic of all true artistic or intellectual attainment. Here, I think, the critics have become impractical visionaries. For it is precisely the active, acute, finely perceptive elements of traditional culture that, *under contemporary conditions*, are incapable of mass dissemination. If spread too widely, they become unrecognizable. Or, perhaps more commonly, they produce boredom and a weary sensation of irrelevance.

Why is it that so much of what to us may seem the best parts of our cultural heritage strikes the majority of our countrymen, and even our students, as supremely irrelevant? The question is not as foolish as it sounds. And it is not to be answered merely by angry assertions of the greatness of a Virgil or a Milton. If almost no one cares to read Milton today, it is not just because we have lost our feeling for traditional culture. It is because most of what an author like Milton has to say has in simple truth become irrelevant to our contemporary lives.

The passivity of our cultural response mirrors the passivity of the society in which we live. Ours is a world without issues—or rather with one issue, so vast and so frightening that people prefer not to talk about it at all. If our students yawn over the classics, it is not just that they are boorish and obtuse; on the contrary, many of them may be acute enough to realize that the subject matter of these great works has very little to do with their own lives. Heroic endeavor, "purity" and chastity, poverty and pestilence, the fine distinctions of theology, the duties of kingship, the perfect society—all these noble old subjects seem muted and remote to contemporary Americans. The hardest task of the historian of ideas is to convince his students or his readers that at one time people cared, even to the point of dying for them, about notions that today seem hopelessly arid and scholastic.

And so we have come to social criticism. Without it, I maintain, any analysis of mass culture is shallow and unprofitable. For I think that there is in fact a qualitative difference between the cultural

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

attitude of the ordinary man today and the plebeian standards within an earlier society. Both, of course, have been concerned primarily with sensual enjoyment. But in past ages the more perceptive and sensitive of the plebs had an uneasy awareness that their lives and standards were far from perfect: their consciences were not clear—at the very least, they felt excluded from the great stage where the major dramas of their time were being enacted. Today the ordinary man does not have the same sense of exclusion. Indeed, he is given a front-row seat: the media see to that. The only trouble is that nothing particularly exciting is going on, on the stage.

Hence there is no incentive to learn the fine points of the drama. If the audience is basically convinced that the great traditional issues of human life, both social and private, no longer have much meaning, if the public senses (as well it may) that the actors themselves are playing their roles mechanically and without putting much conviction into their lines, then its reception of the play will quite naturally be that of lazy-minded and passive spectators. How different things were a couple of generations ago! One has only to conjure up the image of half-literate European workers patiently listening to the exegesis of Marxian texts for hours at a stretch (a common scene around 1900) to realize the difference in cultural climate. These workers were obviously more poorly educated than their American counterparts of today: they had less capacity to follow a closely reasoned argument. But their inclination to do so was greater. For they were convinced that the lengthy and largely incomprehensible speeches of their leaders and teachers were of moment to them. The complex reasoning of these people from a loftier cultural sphere really mattered to their listeners: at some point (perhaps a very far-distant point), their auditors believed, it would make a difference in their own lives, or at least in the lives of their descendants.

Today most people have lost this conviction. They do not think that their own lives will get much better or even that their children will be happier than they are. Indeed, they suspect that the contrary may be true. At the conscious level, they repeat to themselves that they are already living in the promised land. Deeper down, they fear that the vision of such a land has vanished forever.

Unless we realize the full import of this loss of the vision of utopia, we shall never be able to understand properly our country and its culture—and along with these, the more general characteristics of twentieth-century society in the Western world. Without such a realization, we shall not be able to express what it is about mass

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

culture that we find so peculiarly depressing. For, as so many of our contributors have asserted, it is not its *mass* character as such that is novel and threatening: it is rather its slackness and meaninglessness. And this flaccid quality springs precisely from the wider nature of the society of which mass culture is simply the most obvious and flamboyant manifestation.

Let me reiterate that I do not think this to be exclusively an American question. The same socio-cultural complex has recently begun to appear in Western and Central Europe, perhaps with a certain time lag, but still with unmistakably familiar features. And this not through what the defenders of the old culture angrily attack as "Americanization": rather than being primarily an importation from outside, the vast social and cultural change that Europe has been undergoing since the Second World War gives every evidence of indigenous and spontaneous origin; the direct copying from America seems to be relatively superficial.

As I look over the social and ideological scene today, I am impressed with the great similarity among the dominant views in the major Western nations—with the possible exception of Britain, which shows remnants of an earlier pattern of clearly marked and significant differences of opinion. Elsewhere one encounters a kind of gray uniformity. The ideologies that call themselves Christian Democracy in Germany and Italy, Gaullism in France, and the bipartisan consensus in our own country, on closer inspection, turn out to be very much the same thing. They stand for an ideology that is the negation of ideology—and of utopia also. In name and in formal organization they are liberal and democratic, but in fact they seem dedicated to draining liberal democracy of its content. No longer do they have any particular enthusiasm behind them. They rest, rather, on material prosperity, and beyond that, and more important than that, on weariness, on apathy, on passive acceptance, on a tacit agreement not to discuss potentially "divisive" issues—on what still needs to be called "conformity," despite the excessive use of that term during the past half-decade of post-McCarthy breast-beating.

I am not surprised, then, that Mr. Shils has referred to this situation as a "culture of consensus." That is exactly what it is—with all the virtues and all the defects that the term implies. I do not want to be misunderstood: I find this culture more tolerant, gentler, and more humane than anything that the Western world knew before; it provides a setting in which the artist, however marginal and irrelevant he may feel himself to be, is seldom mistreated, and almost

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

never starves. One of our contributors has referred to the price we pay for democracy. I think that is a good expression—provided we recognize both that the price is worth paying and that it is a heavy price indeed.

A generation ago Karl Mannheim warned us of what it would mean to live without utopia—without any notion of transcendence in social and cultural pursuits.[3] He held up to us the vision of a cold, bleak world, a world drained of meaning. More recently writers like Lewis Mumford and Erich Fromm have echoed the warning. I do not agree with Mr. Hyman that we still have a vision of the good society. In fact, I could scarcely disagree more strongly. I believe we have lost that vision: most of us are quite satisfied with the ugliness of our cities, the waste in our economy, the cheerful incompetence of our leaders, the meaninglessness of public discourse, the general insensibility to the overwhelming danger that threatens us. Along with our vision, we have lost our capacity for indignation, our ability to feel a cosmic anger with what we see going on around us. And until we regain this vision, these capacities, our culture will continue to be what it is today—"weary, flat, stale, and unprofitable."

REFERENCES

1 "Daydreams and Nightmares: Reflections on the Criticism of Mass Culture." *The Sewanee Review*, LXV (1957).

2 *History of the United States during the Administrations of Jefferson and Madison*, I (New York, 1889), Chapters 3, 4, 5.

3 *Ideology and Utopia* (London and New York, 1936), pp. 230, 236.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ARTHUR SCHLESINGER, JR.

Notes on a National Cultural Policy

Too much discussion of the problems of mass culture takes the form of handwringing. The point to be understood, I would think, is that these problems, while complicated and often discouraging, are by no means insuperable, unless we ourselves make them so. Things can be done in all sorts of ways to counteract the more depressing tendencies in our mass civilization. I would like in this brief note to call particular attention to possibilities in the field of public policy.

Let me begin with something both important and specific—that is, the problem of television. There are now over 50 million television sets in the country, covering almost 90 percent of American households. From its inception, television has been in a downward spiral as an artistic medium; but it has taken recent disclosures of fraud in quiz programs to awaken the nation to the potentialities locked up in the tiny screen. The question is: what, if anything, can be done to improve the honesty and the quality of our television programing?

The first point is that television is an area in which there can be no question concerning the direct interest of the national government. No one has a divine right to a television channel. The air belongs to the public; and private operators can use the air only under public license. Why therefore should the national government stand helplessly by while private individuals, making vast sums of money out of public licenses, employ public facilities to debase the public taste? Obviously there seems no reason in law or prudence why this should be so. Government has not only the power but the obligation to help establish standards in media, like television and radio, which exist by public sufferance.

It has this obligation, among other reasons, because there seems no other way to rescue television from the downward spiral of com-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

petitive debasement. There are responsible and enlightened men managing television networks and stations; but they are trapped in a competitive situation. The man who gives his audience soap opera and give-away shows will make more money for his stockholders than the man who gives his audience news and Shakespeare. In consequence, the tendency is almost irresistible for television programs to vie with each other, not in elevating the taste of their audiences, but in catering to the worst side of the existing taste. As *Fortune* recently summed up the situation, it seems "that television has reached a kind of ceiling, that mediocrity is increasing, and that only *through some drastic change in the medium's evolution* will the excitement and aspiration of, say, 1954 return to our TV screens" (my italics). *Fortune*'s analysis was, as usual, better than its solution, which was Pay TV. Pay-as-you-see TV would be no more exempt from the passion to maximize its audiences than is free TV; and, in due course, it would doubtless undergo the same evolution. (See *Fortune*, December 1958.)

Still "some drastic change in the medium's evolution" remains necessary. But what? Actually there is nothing new about the situation of responsible TV people; they are in precisely the position that responsible businessmen were in twenty-five years ago when they wanted, for example, to treat their workers better but could not afford to do so because of the "competitive situation." Thus many employers disliked sweatshops and child labor but knew that raising wages and improving working conditions would increase their costs and thereby handicap them as against their more callous competitors. Private initiative was impotent to deal with this situation: gentlemen's agreements within an industry always broke down under pressure. There was only one answer—public action to establish and enforce standards through the industry. Finally the Wages and Hours Act required all employers in interstate commerce to meet certain specifications and thus abolished the economic risks of decency.

What television needs is some comparable means of equalizing the alleged competitive disadvantages of enlightened programing. Fortunately the machinery for this is already at hand. According to the Communications Act of 1934, the Federal Communications Commission is to grant licenses to serve the "public convenience, interest, or necessity." A television channel is an immensely lucrative thing; and those lucky enough to secure an FCC license ought to be regarded, not as owners of private property with which they can do

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

anything they want, but as trustees of public property under the obligation to prove their continuing right to the public trust.

It is up to the FCC, in short, to spell out the equivalent of minimum wages and maximum hours for television. What would this imply? It would surely imply the following:

1. A licensing system which would cover networks as well as individual stations.

2. The writing into each license of a series of stipulations which the grantee pledges himself to fulfill in order to retain the license.

3. A major stipulation would be the assumption by the networks and stations of full control over their programing—which means that sponsors and advertising agencies would no longer influence the content of programs. Other media live off advertisements without letting advertising agencies and sponsors dictate and censor content as they do in television. So long as television permits this, it will be fourth-rate. We should go over to the British and Canadian systems, in which the advertiser purchases time on the air as he purchases space in a newspaper, and has to leave editorial matters alone.

4. Other stipulations might include the allocation of stated portions of broadcast time to cultural and educational programs, to programs dealing with public issues, to local live programs; the limitation of advertising (the House of Commons has currently under consideration a bill prohibiting advertising on British TV for more than six minutes in any hour); the allocation of free time during presidential campaigns to all parties polling more than 10 percent of the vote in the previous election.

5. Licenses should come up for annual renewal; and stations which have not met their obligations should expect to have their licenses revoked (the FCC has not refused a request for license renewal since 1932).

6. All this implies, of course, a revitalization of the FCC, which once had chairmen and commissioners of the caliber of Paul Porter, James Lawrence Fly, and Clifford Durr, but has become in recent years the preserve of complaisant political hacks.

Back in 1946, the FCC proposed in its famous Blue Book doing much this sort of thing for radio; but the industry issued the standard lamentations about governmental control, the public remained indifferent, and nothing came of it. One can expect to hear the same

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wail of "censorship" raised now against proposals for the establishment of federal standards. The fact is that we already have censorship of the worst kind in television. As John Crosby has written, "So long as the advertiser has direct personal control over programs, or direct ownership of programs, it's silly to talk about [government] censorship. The censorship is already stifling. The government should step in not to censor broadcasting but to free it."

The setting of federal standards does not mean government domination of the medium, any more than the Wages and Hours Act meant (as businessmen cried at the time) government domination of business. But the rejection of the Blue Book in 1946 emphasizes the difficulty of the problem. The FCC, even reconstituted as it would have to be in another administration, could not tighten up federal standards by itself. If the FCC proposes to buck the industry, it will require organized public support; it is perhaps a mistake that public energy which might have gone into establishing general standards was diverted into setting up separate facilities for educational television. And the FCC would also probably require some form of administration supplementation—perhaps a National Citizens' Advisory Board, of the kind proposed some years ago by William Benton,[1] or a National Broadcasting Authority, financed by rentals on the licenses, of the sort recently suggested by John Fischer in *Harper's*.[2]

The measures proposed above represent a minimum program. Walter Lippmann and others have recently argued for the establishment of a public network to be "run as a public service with its criterion not what will be most popular but what is good." Lippmann does not suppose that such a network would attract the largest mass audience. "But if it enlisted the great talents which are available in the industry, but are now throttled and frustrated, it might well attract an audience which made up in influence what it lacked in numbers. The force of a good example is a great force, and should not be underrated." Proposals of this sort still horrify many Americans, though fewer now than in the days when Charles Van Doren was a community hero. But clearly, if television cannot clean its own house and develop a sense of responsibility commensurate with its influence, we are bound to come to a government network. If, as Dr. Frank Stanton of the Columbia Broadcasting System insists (*his* italics), "*The strongest sustained attention of Americans is now, daily and nightly, bestowed on television as it is bestowed on nothing*

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

else,"[3] then television is surely a proper subject for public concern. If the industry will not undertake to do itself what is necessary to stop the drift into hopeless mediocrity (and, far from showing any signs of so doing, its leaders deny the reality of the problem and even justify the present state of things by pompous talk about "cultural democracy"), then it must expect public intervention.

The case for government concern over television is indisputable because government must control the air. The case for government concern over other arts rests on a less clear-cut juridical basis. Yet, as John Quincy Adams said one hundred and thirty-five years ago, "The great object of the institution of civil government is the improvement of the condition of those who are parties to the social compact, and no government, in whatever form constituted, can accomplish the lawful ends of its institution but in proportion as it improves the condition of those over whom it is established." Adams added that this applied no less to "moral, political, intellectual improvement" than to internal improvements and public works.

The American government has acknowledged this responsibility variously and intermittently since its foundation. But the problem of government encouragement of the arts is not a simple one; and it has never been satisfactorily solved. In order to bring some coherence into its solution, Congressman Frank Thompson, Jr., of New Jersey has been agitating for some time for the establishment of a Federal Advisory Council on the Arts, to be set up within the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare and charged with assisting the growth of the fine arts in the United States. "A major duty of the Council," the bill (H.R. 7656) reads, "shall be to recommend ways to maintain and increase the cultural resources of the United States."

There is no automatic virtue in councils. Congressman Thompson and Senator Fulbright, for example, got through Congress a year ago an act establishing a National Cultural Center in Washington. After a protracted delay, President Eisenhower named the thirty-four members of the new Center's board of trustees. Of the whole group, only a handful had shown any evidence of knowing or caring anything about the arts; the typical members include such cultural leaders as the former football coach at West Point, the President's minister (balanced, of course, by Catholic and Jewish clerics), his television adviser, representatives of labor, etc. A Federal Advisory Council on the Arts, appointed on such principles, would be worse than useless. But in due course some President will seek our genuine

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

leaders of the arts and ask them to think through the issues of the government relationship.

Let no one mistake it: there are no easy answers here. But also there has been, in this country at least, very little hard thought. Government is finding itself more and more involved in matters of cultural standards and endeavor. The Commission of Fine Arts, the Committee on Government and Art, the National Cultural Center, the Mellon Gallery, the poet at the Library of Congress, the art exhibits under State Department sponsorship, the cultural exchange programs—these represent only a sampling of federal activity in the arts. If we are going to have so much activity anyway, if we are, in addition, worried about the impact of mass culture, there are strong arguments for an affirmative governmental policy to help raise standards. Nor is there reason to suppose that this would necessarily end up in giving governmental sanction to the personal preferences of congressmen and Presidents—e.g., making Howard Chandler Christy and Norman Rockwell the models for American art. Congressmen have learned to defer to experts in other fields, and will learn to defer to experts in this (one doubts, in any case, whether the artistic taste of politicians is as banal as some assume; certainly the taste of the two most recent governors of New York is better than that of most professors).

Certain steps are obvious. Whereas many civilized countries subsidize the arts, we tend to tax them. Let us begin by removing federal taxes on music and the theater. Then we ought to set up a Federal Advisory Council on the Arts composed, not of presidential chums and other hacks, but of professional and creative artists and of responsible executives (museum directors, presidents of conservatories, opera managers, etc.). This Council ought to study American precedents in the field and, even more important, current experiments in government support of the arts in Europe. A program of subsidies for local museums and galleries, for example, would be an obvious possibility.

There is a considerable challenge to social and administrative invention here. As the problems of our affluent society become more qualitative and less quantitative, we must expect culture to emerge as a matter of national concern and to respond to a national purpose. Yet the role of the state can at best be marginal. In the end the vitality of a culture will depend on the creativity of the individual and the sensibility of the audience, and these conditions depend on factors of which the state itself is only a surface expression.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

REFERENCES

1 William Benton, in his testimony before the Senate Interstate Commerce Committee, printed in the 31 May 1951 issue of the *Congressional Record* (A3313-7).

2 John Fischer, "Television and Its Critics," *Harper's Magazine*, July 1959, *219:* 10-14.

3 Frank Stanton, "The Role of Television in Our Society," an address of 26 May 1955.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Documents

De Tocqueville on Democracy and the Arts

In What Spirit the Americans Cultivate the Arts

IT WOULD BE to waste the time of my readers and my own if I strove to demonstrate how the general mediocrity of fortunes, the absence of superfluous wealth, the universal desire for comfort, and the constant efforts by which everyone attempts to procure it make the taste for the useful predominate over the love of the beautiful in the heart of man. Democratic nations, among whom all these things exist, will therefore cultivate the arts that serve to render life easy in preference to those whose object is to adorn it. They will habitually prefer the useful to the beautiful, and they will require that the beautiful should be useful.

But I propose to go further, and, after having pointed out this first feature, to sketch several others.

It commonly happens that in the ages of privilege the practice of almost all the arts becomes a privilege, and that every profession is a separate sphere of action, into which it is not allowable for everyone to enter. Even when productive industry is free, the fixed character that belongs to aristocratic nations gradually segregates all the persons who practice the same art till they form a distinct class, always composed of the same families, whose members are all known to each other and among whom a public opinion of their own and a species of corporate pride soon spring up. In a class or guild of this kind each artisan has not only his fortune to make, but his reputation to preserve. He is not exclusively swayed by his own interest or even by that of his customer, but by that of the body to which he

Reprinted by permission from Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. II (New York: Vintage Books, 1958), pp. 50, 54, 59, 63, 88. Copyright 1945 by Alfred A. Knopf, Inc. (hard-cover edition, 1945, 1948).

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

belongs; and the interest of that body is that each artisan should produce the best possible workmanship. In aristocratic ages the object of the arts is therefore to manufacture as well as possible, not with the greatest speed or at the lowest cost.

When, on the contrary, every profession is open to all, when a multitude of persons are constantly embracing and abandoning it, and when its several members are strangers, indifferent to and because of their numbers hardly seen by each other, the social tie is destroyed, and each workman, standing alone, endeavors simply to gain the most money at the least cost. The will of the customer is then his only limit. But at the same time a corresponding change takes place in the customer also. In countries in which riches as well as power are concentrated and retained in the hands of a few, the use of the greater part of this world's goods belongs to a small number of individuals, who are always the same. Necessity, public opinion, or moderate desires exclude all others from the enjoyment of them. As this aristocratic class remains fixed at the pinnacle of greatness on which it stands, without diminution or increase, it is always acted upon by the same wants and affected by them in the same manner. The men of whom it is composed naturally derive from their superior and hereditary position a taste for what is extremely well made and lasting. This affects the general way of thinking of the nation in relation to the arts. It often occurs among such a people that even the peasant will rather go without the objects he covets than procure them in a state of imperfection. In aristocracies, then, the handicraftsmen work for only a limited number of fastidious customers; the profit they hope to make depends principally on the perfection of their workmanship.

Such is no longer the case when, all privileges being abolished, ranks are intermingled and men are forever rising or sinking in the social scale. Among a democratic people a number of citizens always exists whose patrimony is divided and decreasing. They have contracted, under more prosperous circumstances, certain wants, which remain after the means of satisfying such wants are gone; and they are anxiously looking out for some surreptitious method of providing for them. On the other hand, there is always in democracies a large number of men whose fortune is on the increase, but whose desires grow much faster than their fortunes, and who gloat upon the gifts of wealth in anticipation, long before they have means to obtain them. Such men are eager to find some short cut to these gratifications, already almost within their reach. From the combina-

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tion of these two causes the result is that in democracies there is always a multitude of persons whose wants are above their means and who are very willing to take up with imperfect satisfaction rather than abandon the object of their desires altogether.

The artisan readily understands these passions, for he himself partakes in them. In an aristocracy he would seek to sell his workmanship at a high price to the few; he now conceives that the more expeditious way of getting rich is to sell them at a low price to all. But there are only two ways of lowering the price of commodities. The first is to discover some better, shorter, and more ingenious method of producing them; the second is to manufacture a larger quantity of goods, nearly similar, but of less value. Among a democratic population all the intellectual faculties of the workman are directed to these two objects: he strives to invent methods that may enable him not only to work better, but more quickly and more cheaply; or if he cannot succeed in that, to diminish the intrinsic quality of the thing he makes, without rendering it wholly unfit for the use for which it is intended. When none but the wealthy had watches, they were almost all very good ones; few are now made that are worth much, but everybody has one in his pocket. Thus the democratic principle not only tends to direct the human mind to the useful arts, but it induces the artisan to produce with great rapidity many imperfect commodities, and the consumer to content himself with these commodities.

Not that in democracies the arts are incapable, in case of need, of producing wonders. This may occasionally be so if customers appear who are ready to pay for time and trouble. In this rivalry of every kind of industry, in the midst of this immense competition and these countless experiments, some excellent workmen are formed who reach the utmost limits of their craft. But they rarely have an opportunity of showing what they can do; they are scrupulously sparing of their powers; they remain in a state of accomplished mediocrity, which judges itself, and, though well able to shoot beyond the mark before it, aims only at what it hits. In aristocracies, on the contrary, workmen always do all they can; and when they stop, it is because they have reached the limit of their art.

When I arrive in a country where I find some of the finest productions of the arts, I learn from this fact nothing of the social condition or of the political constitution of the country. But if I perceive that the productions of the arts are generally of an inferior quality, very abundant, and very cheap, I am convinced that among

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the people where this occurs privilege is on the decline and that ranks are beginning to intermingle and will soon become one.

The handicraftsmen of democratic ages not only endeavor to bring their useful productions within the reach of the whole community, but strive to give to all their commodities attractive qualities that they do not in reality possess. In the confusion of all ranks everyone hopes to appear what he is not, and makes great exertions to succeed in this object. This sentiment, indeed, which is only too natural to the heart of man, does not originate in the democratic principle; but that principle applies it to material objects. The hypocrisy of virtue is of every age, but the hypocrisy of luxury belongs more particularly to the ages of democracy.

To satisfy these new cravings of human vanity the arts have recourse to every species of imposture; and these devices sometimes go so far as to defeat their own purpose. Imitation diamonds are now made which may be easily mistaken for real ones; as soon as the art of fabricating false diamonds becomes so perfect that they cannot be distinguished from real ones, it is probable that both will be abandoned and become mere pebbles again.

This leads me to speak of those arts which are called, by way of distinction, the fine arts. I do not believe that it is a necessary effect of a democratic social condition and of democratic institutions to diminish the number of those who cultivate the fine arts, but these causes exert a powerful influence on the manner in which these arts are cultivated. Many of those who had already contracted a taste for the fine arts are impoverished; on the other hand, many of those who are not yet rich begin to conceive that taste, at least by imitation; the number of consumers increases, but opulent and fastidious consumers become more scarce. Something analogous to what I have already pointed out in the useful arts then takes place in the fine arts; the productions of artists are more numerous, but the merit of each production is diminished. No longer able to soar to what is great, they cultivate what is pretty and elegant, and appearance is more attended to than reality.

In aristocracies a few great pictures are produced; in democratic countries a vast number of insignificant ones. In the former statues are raised of bronze; in the latter, they are modeled in plaster.

When I arrived for the first time at New York, by that part of the Atlantic Ocean which is called the East River, I was surprised to perceive along the shore, at some distance from the city, a number of little palaces of white marble, several of which were of classic

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

architecture. When I went the next day to inspect more closely one which had particularly attracted my notice, I found that its walls were of whitewashed brick, and its columns of painted wood. All the edifices that I had admired the night before were of the same kind. . . .

Literary Characteristics of Democratic Times

In an aristocratic people, among whom letters are cultivated, I suppose that intellectual occupations, as well as the affairs of government, are concentrated in a ruling class. The literary as well as the political career is almost entirely confined to this class, or to those nearest to it in rank. These premises suffice for a key to all the rest.

When a small number of the same men are engaged at the same time upon the same objects, they easily concert with one another and agree upon certain leading rules that are to govern them each and all. If the object that attracts the attention of these men is literature, the productions of the mind will soon be subjected by them to precise canons, from which it will no longer be allowable to depart. If these men occupy a hereditary position in the country, they will be naturally inclined, not only to adopt a certain number of fixed rules for themselves, but to follow those which their forefathers laid down for their own guidance; their code will be at once strict and traditional. As they are not necessarily engrossed by the cares of daily life, as they have never been so, any more than their fathers were before them, they have learned to take an interest, for several generations back, in the labors of mind. They have learned to understand literature as an art, to love it in the end for its own sake, and to feel a scholar-like satisfaction in seeing men conform to its rules. Nor is this all: the men of whom I speak began and will end their lives in easy or affluent circumstances; hence they have naturally conceived a taste for carefully chosen gratifications and a love of refined and delicate pleasures. Moreover, a kind of softness of mind and heart, which they frequently contract in the midst of this long and peaceful enjoyment of so much welfare, leads them to put aside, even from their pleasures, whatever might be too startling or too acute. They had rather be amused than intensely excited; they wish to be interested, but not to be carried away.

Now let us fancy a great number of literary performances executed by the men, or for the men, whom I have just described, and we

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

shall readily conceive a style of literature in which everything will be regular and prearranged. The slightest work will be carefully wrought in its least details; art and labor will be conspicuous in everything; each kind of writing will have rules of its own, from which it will not be allowed to swerve and which distinguish it from all others. Style will be thought of almost as much importance as thought, and the form will be no less considered than the matter; the diction will be polished, measured, and uniform. The tone of the mind will be always dignified, seldom very animated, and writers will care more to perfect what they produce than to multiply their productions. It will sometimes happen that the members of the literary class, always living among themselves and writing for themselves alone, will entirely lose sight of the rest of the world, which will infect them with a false and labored style; they will lay down minute literary rules for their exclusive use, which will insensibly lead them to deviate from common sense and finally to transgress the bounds of nature. By dint of striving after a mode of parlance different from the popular, they will arrive at a sort of aristocratic jargon which is hardly less remote from pure language than is the coarse dialect of the people. Such are the natural perils of literature among aristocracies. Every aristocracy that keeps itself entirely aloof from the people becomes impotent, a fact which is as true in literature as it is in politics.*

Let us now turn the picture and consider the other side of it; let us transport ourselves into the midst of a democracy not unprepared by ancient traditions and present culture to partake in the pleasures of mind. Ranks are there intermingled and identified; knowledge and power are both infinitely subdivided and, if I may use the expression, scattered on every side. Here, then, is a motley multitude whose intellectual wants are to be supplied. These new votaries of the pleasures of mind have not all received the same education; they do not resemble their fathers; nay, they perpetually differ from themselves, for they live in a state of incessant change of place,

* All this is especially true of the aristocratic countries that have been long and peacefully subject to a monarchical government. When liberty prevails in an aristocracy, the higher ranks are constantly obliged to make use of the lower classes; and when they use, they approach them. This frequently introduces something of a democratic spirit into an aristocratic community. There springs up, moreover, in a governing privileged body an energy and habitually bold policy, a taste for stir and excitement, which must infallibly affect all literary performances.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

feelings, and fortunes. The mind of each is therefore unattached to that of his fellows by tradition or common habits; and they have never had the power, the inclination, or the time to act together. It is from the bosom of this heterogeneous and agitated mass, however, that authors spring; and from the same source their profits and their fame are distributed.

I can without difficulty understand that under these circumstances I must expect to meet in the literature of such a people with but few of those strict conventional rules which are admitted by readers and writers in aristocratic times. If it should happen that the men of some one period were agreed upon any such rules, that would prove nothing for the following period; for among democratic nations each new generation is a new people. Among such nations, then, literature will not easily be subjected to strict rules, and it is impossible that any such rules should ever be permanent.

In democracies it is by no means the case that all who cultivate literature have received a literary education; and most of those who have some tinge of belles-lettres are engaged either in politics or in a profession that only allows them to taste occasionally and by stealth the pleasures of mind. These pleasures, therefore, do not constitute the principal charm of their lives, but they are considered as a transient and necessary recreation amid the serious labors of life. Such men can never acquire a sufficiently intimate knowledge of the art of literature to appreciate its more delicate beauties; and the minor shades of expression must escape them. As the time they can devote to letters is very short, they seek to make the best use of the whole of it. They prefer books which may be easily procured, quickly read, and which require no learned researches to be understood. They ask for beauties self-proffered and easily enjoyed; above all, they must have what is unexpected and new. Accustomed to the struggle, the crosses, and the monotony of practical life, they require strong and rapid emotions, startling passages, truths or errors brilliant enough to rouse them up and to plunge them at once, as if by violence, into the midst of the subject.

Why should I say more, or who does not understand what is about to follow before I have expressed it? Taken as a whole, literature in democratic ages can never present, as it does in the periods of aristocracy, an aspect of order, regularity, science, and art; its form, on the contrary, will ordinarily be slighted, sometimes despised. Style will frequently be fantastic, incorrect, overburdened, and loose, almost always vehement and bold. Authors will aim at rapidity of

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

execution more than at perfection of detail. Small productions will be more common than bulky books; there will be more wit than erudition, more imagination than profundity; and literary performances will bear marks of an untutored and rude vigor of thought, frequently of great variety and singular fecundity. The object of authors will be to astonish rather than to please, and to stir the passions more than to charm the taste.

Here and there, indeed, writers will doubtless occur who will choose a different track and who, if they are gifted with superior abilities, will succeed in finding readers in spite of their defects or their better qualities; but these exceptions will be rare, and even the authors who so depart from the received practice in the main subject of their works will always relapse into it in some lesser details.

The Trade of Literature

Democracy not only infuses a taste for letters among the trading classes, but introduces a trading spirit into literature.

In aristocracies readers are fastidious and few in number; in democracies they are far more numerous and far less difficult to please. The consequence is that among aristocratic nations no one can hope to succeed without great exertion, and this exertion may earn great fame, but can never procure much money; while among democratic nations a writer may flatter himself that he will obtain at a cheap rate a moderate reputation and a large fortune. For this purpose he need not be admired; it is enough that he is liked.

The ever increasing crowd of readers and their continual craving for something new ensure the sale of books that nobody much esteems.

In democratic times the public frequently treat authors as kings do their courtiers; they enrich and despise them. What more is needed by the venal souls who are born in courts or are worthy to live there?

Democratic literature is always infested with a tribe of writers who look upon letters as a mere trade; and for some few great authors who adorn it, you may reckon thousands of idea-mongers.

Some Observations on the Drama Among Democratic Nations

The Puritans who founded the American republics not only were enemies to amusements, but they professed an especial abhorrence for the stage. They considered it as an abominable pastime; and as

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

long as their principles prevailed with undivided sway, scenic performances were wholly unknown among them. These opinions of the first fathers of the colonies have left very deep traces on the minds of their descendants.

The extreme regularity of habits and the great strictness of morals that are observable in the United States have as yet little favored the growth of dramatic art. There are no dramatic subjects in a country which has witnessed no great political catastrophes and in which love invariably leads by a straight and easy road to matrimony. People who spend every day in the week in making money, and Sunday in going to church, have nothing to invite the Muse of Comedy.

A single fact suffices to show that the stage is not very popular in the United States. The Americans, whose laws allow of the utmost freedom, and even license of language in all other respects, have nevertheless subjected their dramatic authors to a sort of censorship. Theatrical performances can take place only by permission of the municipal authorities. This may serve to show how much communities are like individuals; they surrender themselves unscrupulously to their ruling passions and afterwards take the greatest care not to yield too much to the vehemence of tastes that they do not possess.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WILLIAM I. NICHOLS

Editing for 13,000,000 Families

THE FOLLOWING ARTICLE by William I. Nichols provides a rare glimpse of how and where much of mass culture is being produced, and by whom. It is a condensed (and approved) version of a talk given last year by Mr. Nichols, the Editor-in-Chief of *This Week* magazine. The occasion was the annual meeting of the representatives of the forty-two newspapers that actively participate in setting editorial policy and help distribute that magazine, as a supplement, to more than one-fourth of all the families in the United States every Sunday. Some of the comments on Mr. Nichols' talk on the part of these working editors are also given. This material, therefore, is an authentic document, as it were, a set of data that will help give an operational meaning to terms such as mass communication, mass media, and mass culture.—Ed.

I WANT TO SAY a few words that will help set the mood of our meeting in terms of what I feel to be the mood of the country, and how we at *This Week* should try to break into our job of producing a magazine which will supplement your efforts and help your organizations during the year ahead.

The past year can be summed up in two words, *very competitive*! A natural sequence to this statement is this: the minute anything becomes very competitive, it also becomes very imitative. That is our biggest problem and our biggest danger.

It is a fallacy to assume that competition always produces originality and enterprise. Sometimes competition produces nothing but copying, and I have here a wonderful exhibit on that score.

Not long ago I was out in Minneapolis making a talk to the executives of one of our principal advertisers, and I was wondering just how I would describe this copycat problem that was so much on my

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

mind. As I went into the hotel I took one look at the newsstand and there, as usual, was a dazzling array of magazines, including three of "pocket" book size: *Reader's Digest, Pageant,* and *Coronet.* I will now read to you two sets of titles of the stories that each magazine chose to promote on its cover. The *Reader's Digest* was saying, "Is it true what they say about husbands?" *Pageant* made a bolder departure with "Why do some men fail their wives?" *Coronet* went still further over this forbidden frontier and talked about "A marriage counselor tells the truth about sex in marriage."

The *Reader's Digest* also carried a big article about "Your amazing glands," *Pageant,* one called "An amazing pill that will prolong life," and *Coronet* came out with "A new pep-up diet for middle-age vitality."

If you take these three magazines, all the same size, all featuring the same articles, virtually the same headlines, then I think you begin to have an idea of what we are up against. And wherever you turn in this competitive world, it seems to me you run into the same phenomenon. It isn't peculiar to us. Wherever you go, you find people complaining about it, whether in terms of TV programs, detergents, or toothpaste.

Wherever you are, you have a feeling that this is where you came in. The fact is that we are surrounded by what you might call "homogenized" journalism. Everything has been whipped up and put into the mixer and it comes out tasting very much the same. In a recent article run in the *Saturday Evening Post's* distinguished series on "Adventures of the Mind," Randall Jarrell took advantage of the diplomatic immunity that was given to writers in this series and made a nice swing right at the mid-rib of the *Saturday Evening Post,* and the press in general. He talked not about "homogenized journalism" but about "Instant Literature," and said, "The makers of Instant Literature, whether it is a soap opera, a *Saturday Evening Post* serial, or a historical sexual best seller, humor us—flatter our prejudices and show us that they know us for what they think us to be: Impressionable, emotional, ignorant, somewhat weak-minded Common Men." And then comes a sentence which underlines this point, "Each year *Harper's,* the *Saturday Evening Post* and the Sunday supplements seem more nearly the same magazine."

Well, that is our problem—competition breeds imitation, and the bigger you get the more acute that problem becomes. And that is one of the things that has haunted me during this past year.

This Week has reached a circulation of 13 million copies every

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Sunday. If you were to take a statistical profile of *This Week* and superimpose it on the population of the United States, you would find that the readership of *This Week* represents the public of the United States as a whole. And that brings us face to face with the problem of homogenization. The bigger you get the more you tend to gravitate toward talking about the big, common-denominator subjects; and the more you talk about the big, common-denominator subjects, the more danger there is of being just like everybody else—just like the big television programs, just like the other Sunday magazines, just like every other aspect and manifestation of mass journalism. And if you are not careful you are going to find that instead of producing something new, original, different, distinctive, important, memorable, or valuable, you are simply in a struggle where you are fighting for a plus or minus point in the readership surveys, so you can say, "My article about American husbands is better than your article about American husbands."

Frankly, I think that that isn't good enough. It isn't good enough in terms of my conception of what *This Week* should be, and it shouldn't be good enough in terms of what your conception of what *This Week* should be. You remember the joke in the *New Yorker* where one little Quaker boy says to another: "My father is meeker than thine." If we are not careful we are going to end up with our promotion men saying, "My Sunday magazine is blander than thine."

We have got somehow within our limitations—and very real limitations they are—to find some way of being something that has an edge to it, so that when people talk about *This Week* you know that they mean they are talking about *This Week*, and not talking about the *American Weekly*, and not talking about *Parade*, and not talking about *Family Weekly;* they are talking about something that is something, that brings something, that does something in its own name.

Now, how do you do that? The answer, I think, is first of all to stop imitating and decide what service you can render. You know the old rule for success, whether it is a business, or an invention, or anything else—to find a need and fill it. Well, it seems to me that applies to us. You have to find a service we can render—a service supplementary to the very real service which newspapers already render—and stick to it.

What is our need? That is the key question of our meeting, and I am taking my time now to talk deliberately on this rather general problem, because it seems to me if I can establish this, then all our

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

other discussions about articles, subjects, layout, and everything else will fall into place and have a little bit of extra purpose.

The problem that concerns us all is that of trying to have an affirmative attitude, of trying to give some sense of purpose and importance to people, in a world which is spinning so dizzily that it leaves us all not only sometimes car-sick and air-sick but often heart-sick and soul-sick, too.

I have brought along three quotations which, out of all the things I have read in the course of this year, somehow seem to give a picture of what the problem of our time is, what the mood of the period is—the need which we can fill. The first is a story that appeared in the *New York Times*. It is a quotation from Boris Pregel, the President of the New York Academy of Sciences.

> The average industrial work week will be reduced, "probably very soon," to twenty hours, the retiring president of the New York Academy of Sciences predicted last night. Dr. Boris Pregel told 250 scientists that a world re-altered by automation and the abundance of cheap nuclear energy would bring about a class of "leisure-stricken" individuals who would replace the "poverty-stricken." He foresaw downgraded skilled industrial workers, beset by boredom. . . . Because technical developments outrun social progress, he said, resources of entertainment will be "grievously insufficient" to accommodate the needs of a growing number of "leisure-stricken."

That is a good phrase to remember, "leisure-stricken."

The next quotation comes from a report that has had a wonderfully strong response. It has been quoted up and down the land and has generally precipitated a new phrase into our vocabulary. That is the Rockefeller Report on Education called "The Pursuit of Excellence," prepared by a group headed by John Gardner, a director of the Carnegie Foundation. Embodied in this report is a statement you may know because we used it on our Page 2 on October 26th.

> What most people, young or old, want is not merely security, or comfort, or luxury—although they are glad enough to have these. *They want meaning in their lives.* If their era and their culture and their leaders do not or cannot offer them great meanings, great objectives, great convictions, then they will settle for shallow and trivial meanings.
>
> People who live aimlessly, who allow the search for meaning in their lives to be satisfied by shallow and meretricious experiences have simply not been stirred by any alternative meanings—religious meanings, ethical values, ideas of social and civic responsibility, high standards of self-realization.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

> This is a deficiency for which we all bear a responsibility. It is a failure of home, church, school, government—a failure of all of us.
>
> But it is also an opportunity for us, too.

Now we come to the third quotation, published at Christmas in *Time Magazine* in a much-talked-about critique of Rollo May, the psychiatrist, whose ideas seem to be challenging the older and more traditional forms of psychiatry. I will read a quotation or two which somehow seem to interrelate the things I have been talking about, the "leisure-stricken" aspect of our society, and the hunger for meaning, purpose, and significance.

> Since World War II, Dr. May contends, there has been another change: most of the anxiety that he sees in practice comes from the fact that *too many people feel that life has lost its meaning* for them. This, he argues, brings anxiety to the surface.
>
> Nowadays, when people first sense this normal anxiety they may still repress it and consequently develop an ultra-modern form of neurotic anxiety with symptoms of depression, blocking in regard to work, despair, and melancholy, summed up in the cry "What I do isn't worth anything." The trouble lies, says May, in dammed-up potentialities, rather than repressed instincts.
>
> Americans, says May, use perpetual work as a defense against anxiety. They cannot face life itself, because life as such has lost its meaning. In the U. S. this despondency has been sharply intensified by the realization that a hydrogen-bomb war could wipe out all life; so the threat of it brings man abruptly face to face with . . . non-existence and . . . nothingness.

What is the relationship of these quotations to our problem? I think any publication has to have a conception of the frame of reference in which it is operating. Any good editor has to have a philosophy, and I think that our challenge now is to see if we can't recognize the fact that the public as a whole is hungry for some form of leadership, inspiration, guidance, which will help fill the vacuum of this "leisure-stricken" age, and give a sense of purpose and direction in a time when too many people feel rootless, leaderless, and rudderless.

Recently I saw this function fulfilled at a lunch given in honor of Commander Anderson and the crew of the missile sub *Nautilus*, just after the historic cruise under the North Pole. In all the years of going to "civic functions" I have never seen such a turnout. It was

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the most distinguished gathering of New Yorkers I have ever seen.

And never have I seen the air so full of excitement and enthusiasm. Never have I heard great words spoken so spontaneously, old words that suddenly took on new meaning. It took you back to the days of Winston Churchill when he talked about blood and sweat and tears. Again, old words came to life again, words like *"valor," "the adventurous spirit," "enterprise," "excellence," "competence," "imagination," "courage,"* and *"skill."*

Now those are all old words, but suddenly they seemed to take on meaning. And why? Because something had happened to make them real and to make that group, each member of it, proud to be an American. Something had happened to give back a sense of meaning and purpose and worthwhileness to life.

Now, somehow my concept is that this is where our job lies. The imitative field is still there. We have still got to keep up with the Joneses, as you will see if you read the list of the year's major promotable articles. We still need hard-news promotables. We want the best names, and we want to have the strongest statements. We still need to cover entertainment, in the field of television and sports and movies and everywhere else. We still need to do our very best to get the best fiction, the best cartoons, and so on. But as to all these other things, let's just remember that however good we are, we never, never can completely dominate the field. You all know the old rule, "Never do anything that anybody else can do better." And I still carry several sample magazines around which underline that point. For example: a copy of the magazine *Europeo*, which I picked up in Rome the day after the new Pope was elected, had his picture on the cover—in full color! We go to press six weeks early. We are never going to beat that.

When it comes to sex and sensation pick up any issue of *Playboy* (I don't carry it publicly) and you will find that you are not going to beat that.

And when it comes to service, we never can or will tell people how to cook hamburger in as many billions of words as *Good Housekeeping* or *Better Homes and Gardens*.

But what we can do, it seems to me, thanks to the character we have built up at *This Week*, and thanks to the character that you have built up in your papers, and thanks to the kind of people that we have gathered together in our family of 13 million readers—what we can do is to represent a steady, healthy vibration in American life. We can give people a renewed sense of meaning and

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

purpose and importance. That is where our special section on Page Two comes in. And through our main articles we can give them a sense of opening up gateways of opportunity to new and better ways for people to use their free time, their leisure time, to be better members of the family and of the community and of our country as a whole, and thus share personally in the building of A Better America. On every page we can concentrate on the individual reader, look him in the eye, speak to him directly as a human being, let him participate in the fun and excitement of building this great magazine. That happens through such features as "I've Got A Question," or "Dick Clark Speaking," or "How America Eats," or "Quiz 'Em," and all the other person-to-person features in which we seek to achieve, not just reader interest, but reader intimacy and reader response and—most important of all—reader participation. That is the basis of *This Week*'s "friend and neighbor" approach which underlies all our editorial thinking, and which causes us, in all we do, to think and act in terms of the individual.

Now there, it seems to me, is a mission and a job. If we do it right we are not going to find ourselves confused and confounded by our imitators.

Later on, during our working sessions we shall be talking about all this in greater detail—our plans for the "Words To Live By" page, the new "Meaning of Life" series, our new plan for "Gateway" articles, each one opening the door and leading the way to some new hobby, recreational activity, or home-study project which will help the reader to grow as an individual. But at this point, all I want to do is to state my deep and firm conviction that this is our job, our area, that we must move into it, that we must continue to fill it with such a sense of leadership and inspiration that nobody, anywhere, can catch up with us on it.

What I have said is not impractical because this, I know, is what people want more than anything. If we are successful in meeting this want, it is going to rub off in terms of circulation, in terms of advertising revenue, in terms of response, and, therefore, from every standpoint it is the biggest thing there is.

Key quotations from the ensuing discussion among the editors of distributing newspapers follow.

MR. T: We even liked a lot of your mistakes this year. (Laughter) When we get telegrams from you that there is a mistake in a recipe or something, instead of apologizing for it, we capitalize on it and

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

write a promotion ad that makes people look for the mistake that you did make. After all, you are supposed to be perfect. When you do make a minor error it just proves that you are human. People do not like perfect things.

MR. S: I think part of your problem as an editor is that you perhaps respect too much the little prejudices that we as individual editors have, and I think if we are going to make this thing move in the direction it has got to move in, all of us around the table have got to agree that you are going to select some material during the next year which will not conform to our local prejudices and our local needs and our local narrowness and our local restrictions, so that you can in effect give *This Week* the edge you are talking about. And if you can't do that you are just consigned to blandness. That is the greatest editorial challenge you have got this year.

MR. O: I have the feeling, listening to everyone here, that everything is oversurveyed and overresearched; I am not completely convinced that that is the way to get a proper magazine, or one that will appeal to me.

MR. L: Why not stand on your own ideas? I can imagine *Parade* and *American Weekly* might have a meeting like this, and give the same questions out and say, "Help us out. Tell us what to do," and the result probably would be very much the same. You would come out with the same articles and wonder why you did it. Why not have a list of subjects that no other paper will have, no other magazine of this type will have?

MR. F: With *This Week* magazine I don't find any fault. We have three or four magazines and *This Week* is one of them. Maybe I like it because we made some money last year out of it.

MR. H: I think the purpose of inspiration and entertainment is about all that *This Week* has to have. Surveys may tend to make you a little too conscious of competition with magazines that you are really not in competition with.

I would like to support what you said about your purpose and inspirational qualities as something that is very much needed. In the news section, we can, and will, and do scare the pants off our readers. We would like you to give them a pleasant Sunday afternoon and an inspirational lift.

MR. W: I subscribe very heartily to what has been said about the people approach. If I may, I would like to read a quote because I think it is constructive. "Don't write about ideas or things, but about *the people* who have the ideas or who build or break the things.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Let the ideas and the things be described but by all means make them incidental."

MR. F: One of the reasons I came is that we are faced with a price increase for the Sunday edition, and I believe we are going to have to do a bit more selling than we have before. I personally believe in strong promotion. We have done it on the newspaper as a whole, and particularly on our daily, but we haven't done it as much as we should on *This Week* magazine.

MR. P: There have been a lot of good ideas expressed. Mainly, the idea is that you don't have to agree with us editors all the time. The hell with us. Give us some rows. It is wonderful. I realize you have got to avoid religion and a few of those things. I am afraid with your staff of editors you are more and more letting survey experts edit it. I would be much more satisfied to distribute a magazine that ran a piece as a result of Bill Nichols' having said, "That is a damn interesting story," than one that fits all the elements of a survey.

MR. NICHOLS: Needless to say, I subscribe to what P. says. On the other hand, when it comes to the advertising side, and to some extent the newspaper side, people like to be convinced that you are not just dealing with pie-in-the-sky, that what you do is not good just because you think so, but because other people think so, and they want proof.

I have always felt that the answer to that comes not just in surveys, which can always be self-serving, but *in results*. My pride is that *This Week* produces more book advertising than any other publication. My pride is that when *This Week* goes out to get coupons we get more coupons-per-dollar than any other publication does. I don't think we can deny that Madison Avenue is just loaded with people who need and want proof, and you are in a position of weakness unless you can produce it. And that is where the need for research comes in.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Notes from the Academy

On 21 October 1959 the American Academy of Arts and Sciences presented the Emerson-Thoreau Medal to Thomas Stearns Eliot. His response, including the poem he read on that occasion, appears below. In introducing Mr. Eliot, W. J. Bate said in part:

'Hazlitt was wiser than many of Burke's later critics when he said that the only fair sample of Burke was "all that he wrote." To some extent this is true of most major writers. Even Eliot's *Four Quartets*, which are only a fraction of what he has written, subsume a good deal. There is what they subsume, first of all, of English poetry itself during the last century or more: the extent, for example, to which they fulfill what Keats, speaking of Wordsworth, calls the challenge of the poetry of the future—a "thinking into the human heart." There is also the fact that these poems are concerned with the common denominator of all experience—time, which is a fairly capacious subject. Reading the *Four Quartets*, we are always conscious of the tragic past: tragic in its traditional sense of the inevitable, remorseless working out of events. Here we have put, massively and persuasively, the modern sense of the irrevocability of past time, and the hope that some rescue of it may be possible, a rescue that would apply equally to the present, which is always fading with the past, and to the future, which is otherwise doomed to the same pattern. At the same time that you have this vertical sweep through time, and the sense of all that life, there is also the horizontal sweep from the "shores of Asia" to the Edgware Road in London, from the Mississippi to the granite rocks off Cape Ann.

'Significantly, in *The Dry Salvages*, this sense of the sea, which "is all about us," with its huge, varied life, and containing the wreckage of so large a past, begins from an American shore: there are the Gloucester fishermen, the lobster pots, and the threat of the northeast storms. So with the inner life, in this moving exploration of the nature of time. The eroding, constant, primeval river that is always "within us" has also an American setting: the imagery reverts to the heartland of this country, to the Mississippi and the "April dooryard" of the southern mid-West.

'Add to these American settings the fact that we have in Eliot what used to be praised in New England as a "Come-outer," a man of conviction who comes out for what he believes, wherever it takes him, a man who (like the man from Missouri, which Mr. Eliot also is) has to find his own answer—and we sense some of the reasons why this Academy should select Mr. Eliot for the award of this very American prize, the Emerson-Thoreau Medal for Achievement in Literature.'

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

T. S. ELIOT

The Influence of Landscape upon the Poet

WHEN I WAS INFORMED of the time placed at my disposal for what I might have to say on this occasion, I was seized with apprehension. I most heartily wished to signify my appreciation of the honour which has been accorded to me by the Academy. Any allocution to that end should, I considered, be something quite new, fresh—even if not epoch-making. In any case, I do not keep a drawerful of unpublished lectures and sermons for repeated use, and when I have undertaken to deliver an address for the second time I have usually found it a painful experience: for I am sure to come across some passages of which I have forgotten the meaning, and others where I have come to disagree with my own opinions. I wished to write something quite new, and if possible worthy of the occasion; but I knew that between the time of the invitation, and my departure from England, I simply should not have the leisure. I was reminded of the time, many years ago, when I did deliver, in this country, the same lectures repeatedly in various universities: it was a way of getting about and seeing America and earning the money to do so. There was one occasion on which I had to prepare a new lecture at short notice, and a lecture which I never delivered again anywhere. I had undertaken to speak at a certain university—I prefer to forget where—and two days beforehand encountered a friend who said that he looked forward to hearing me on the subject of the great English letter writers. Startled, I returned to my rooms and looked up the correspondence: sure enough, the invitation was to deliver a lecture on a foundation dedicated to Great English Letter Writers. So I prepared a lecture of the right length, with some references to Letter Writers in it, the letters of Keats and D. H. Lawrence being fresh in my memory: I managed to take up a good deal of time, I remember, by expatiating on the subject of my own ignorance in general, with particular reference to

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

my ignorance of English Letter Writers. Whether the address was a success or not I do not know.

You may suspect from this anecdote that what I am saying now is merely an elaborate way of saying that I have nothing to say. Not so. I shall only talk briefly, it is true, and after that I propose to read to you one of my "Quartets," but there is a relation between what I have to say and the poem I shall read. For my subject is simply *The Influence of Landscape upon the Poet.* The association of ideas by which I came to the subject is somewhat as follows. This is the Emerson-Thoreau Award: it brings to mind Concord in particular and New England in general. Then I reflected that my honoured predecessor, the *doyen* of American poets to-day, was Robert Frost, distinctly in the mind of everyone a New England poet. I then asked myself whether I had any title to be a New England poet—as is my elder contemporary Robert Frost, and as is my junior contemporary, Robert Lowell: and I think I have. Of course I know that the Academy is the American Academy; and just as the French Academy is not the Paris Academy, but draws its immortals from every region of France, so likewise the American Academy draws upon all the—I was about to say forty-eight but realise that I must now say fifty states: and let me extend my best wishes to Alaska for future representation here as well as in Washington. Nevertheless, this seems the occasion for me to stake my claim to a New England status. I am used to dealing with the question of whether I am, qua poet, American or English; and usually can escape by pointing out that whichever Wystan Auden is, I am the other: though seriously my poetry, like that of other poets, shows traces of every environment in which I have lived.

Now, when I speak of the influence of landscape, I am not thinking of Nature Poetry. Robert Frost is not definable as a Poet of Nature; his scope is much wider than that, and he is a poet of human nature as well as of flora, fauna, and landscape: but he is certainly a poet who has been deeply affected by the New England landscape. It is true that I am from Missouri, and that my father before me was born in St. Louis. But Robert Frost was born in San Francisco, which is a good deal farther away from New England than is St. Louis. He came East, according to that useful compendium, *The Oxford Companion to American Literature,* at the age of ten. Well, I came East too, at the age of seventeen, to a school not remote from Brookline; and as far back as I can remember and before, my family had spent every summer on the New England coast. So my personal landscape is a composite. In St. Louis, my grandmother—as was very

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

natural—wanted to live on in the house that my grandfather had built; my father, from filial piety, did not wish to leave the house that he had built only a few steps away; and so it came to be that we lived on in a neighbourhood which had become shabby to a degree approaching slumminess, after all our friends and acquaintances had moved further west. And in my childhood, before the days of motor cars, people who lived in town stayed in town. So it was, that for nine months of the year my scenery was almost exclusively urban, and a good deal of it seedily, drably urban at that. My urban imagery was that of St. Louis, upon which that of Paris and London have been superimposed. It was also, however, the Mississippi, as it passes between St. Louis and East St. Louis in Illinois: the Mississippi was the most powerful feature of Nature in that environment. My country landscape, on the other hand, is that of New England, of coastal New England, and New England from June to October. In St. Louis I never tasted an oyster or a lobster—we were too far from the sea. In Massachusetts, the small boy who was a devoted bird watcher never saw his birds of the season when they were making their nests.

I am not maintaining that early impressions are the only ones that count. Far from it: later impressions come to cover them, and to fuse, in some sort, with them. English landscape has come to be as significant for me, and as emotionally charged, as New England landscape. I do believe, however, that the impressions made by English landscape upon myself are different from those made upon poets for whom it has been the environment of their childhood.

What I have been saying was, in its first intention, merely an elaboration of the simple "Thank you." But I hope that my words will shed some light upon the poem I am about to read; and also substantiate, to some degree, my claim to being, among other things, a New England poet. You will notice, however, that this poem* begins where I began, with the Mississippi; and that it ends, where I and my wife expect to end, at the parish church of a tiny village in Somerset.

* From *Four Quartets*, copyright, 1943, by T. S. Eliot. Reprinted by permission of Harcourt, Brace and Company, Inc.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The Dry Salvages

I do not know much about gods; but I think that the river
Is a strong brown god—sullen, untamed and untractable,
Patient to some degree, at first recognised as a frontier;
Useful, untrustworthy, as a conveyor of commerce;
Then only a problem confronting the builder of bridges.
The problem once solved, the brown god is almost forgotten
By the dwellers in cities—ever, however, implacable,
Keeping his seasons and rages, destroyer, reminder
Of what men choose to forget. Unhonoured, unpropitiated
By worshippers of the machine, but waiting, watching and waiting.
His rhythm was present in the nursery bedroom,
In the rank ailanthus of the April dooryard,
In the smell of grapes on the autumn table,
And the evening circle in the winter gaslight.

The river is within us, the sea is all about us;
The sea is the land's edge also, the granite

Into which it reaches, the beaches where it tosses
Its hints of earlier and other creation:
The starfish, the hermit crab, the whale's backbone;
The pools where it offers to our curiosity
The more delicate algae and the sea anemone.
It tosses up our losses, the torn seine.
The shattered lobsterpot, the broken oar
And the gear of foreign dead men. The sea has many voices,
Many gods and many voices.
The salt is on the briar rose,
The fog is in the fir trees.
The sea howl
And the sea yelp, are different voices
Often together heard; the whine in the rigging,
The menace and caress of wave that breaks on water,
The distant rote in the granite teeth,
And the wailing warning from the approaching headland
Are all sea voices, and the heaving groaner
Rounded homewards, and the seagull:
And under the oppression of the silent fog
The tolling bell
Measures time not our time, rung by the unhurried
Ground swell, a time

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Older than the time of chronometers, older
Than time counted by anxious worried women
Lying awake, calculating the future,
Trying to unweave, unwind, unravel
And piece together the past and the future,
Between midnight and dawn, when the past is all deception,
The future futureless, before the morning watch
When time stops and time is never ending;
And the ground swell, that is and was from the beginning,
Clangs
The bell.

II

Where is there an end of it, the soundless wailing,
The silent withering of autumn flowers
Dropping their petals and remaining motionless;
Where is there an end to the drifting wreckage,
The prayer of the bone on the beach, the unprayable
Prayer at the calamitous annunciation?

There is no end, but addition: the trailing
Consequence of further days and hours,
While emotion takes to itself the emotionless
Years of living among the breakage
Of what was believed in as the most reliable—
And therefore the fittest for renunciation.

There is the final addition, the failing
Pride or resentment at failing powers,
The unattached devotion which might pass for devotionless,
In a drifting boat with a slow leakage,
The silent listening to the undeniable
Clamour of the bell of the last annunciation.

Where is the end of them, the fishermen sailing
Into the wind's tail, where the fog cowers?
We cannot think of a time that is oceanless
Or of an ocean not littered with wastage
Or of a future that is not liable
Like the past, to have no destination.

We have to think of them as forever bailing,
Setting and hauling, while the North East lowers
Over shallow banks unchanging and erosionless
Or drawing their money, drying sails at dockage;
Not as making a trip that will be unpayable
For a haul that will not bear examination.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

There is no end of it, the voiceless wailing,
No end to the withering of withered flowers,
To the movement of pain that is painless and motionless,
To the drift of the sea and the drifting wreckage,
The bone's prayer to Death its God. Only the hardly, barely prayable
Prayer of the one Annunciation.

It seems, as one becomes older,
That the past has another pattern, and ceases to be a mere sequence—
Or even development: the latter a partial fallacy
Encouraged by superficial notions of evolution,
Which becomes, in the popular mind, a means of disowning the past.
The moments of happiness—not the sense of well-being,
Fruition, fulfillment, security or affection,
Or even a very good dinner, but the sudden illumination—
We had the experience but missed the meaning,
And approach to the meaning restores the experience
In a different form, beyond any meaning
We can assign to happiness. I have said before
That the past experience revived in the meaning
Is not the experience of one life only
But of many generations—not forgetting
Something that is probably quite ineffable:
The backward look behind the assurance
Of recorded history, the backward half-look
Over the shoulder, towards the primitive terror.
Now, we come to discover that the moments of agony
(Whether, or not, due to misunderstanding,
Having hoped for the wrong things or dreaded the wrong things,
Is not in question) are likewise permanent
With such permanence as time has. We appreciate this better
In the agony of others, nearly experienced,
Involving ourselves, than in our own.
For our own past is covered by the currents of action,
But the torment of others remains an experience
Unqualified, unworn by subsequent attrition.
People change, and smile: but the agony abides.
Time the destroyer is time the preserver,
Like the river with its cargo of dead Negroes, cows and chicken coops,
The bitter apple and the bite in the apple.
And the ragged rock in the restless waters,
Waves wash over it, fogs conceal it;
On a halcyon day it is merely a monument,
In navigable weather it is always a seamark
To lay a course by: but in the sombre season
Or the sudden fury, is what it always was.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

III

I sometimes wonder if that is what Krishna meant—
Among other things—or one way of putting the same thing:
That the future is a faded song, a Royal Rose or a lavender spray
Of wistful regret for those who are not yet here to regret,
Pressed between yellow leaves of a book that has never been opened.
And the way up is the way down, the way forward is the way back.
You cannot face it steadily, but this thing is sure,
That time is no healer: the patient is no longer here.
When the train starts, and the passengers are settled
To fruit, periodicals and business letters
(And those who saw them off have left the platform)
Their faces relax from grief into relief,
To the sleepy rhythm of a hundred hours.
Fare forward, travellers! not escaping from the past
Into different lives, or into any future;
You are not the same people who left that station
Or who will arrive at any terminus,
While the narrowing rails slide together behind you;
And on the deck of the drumming liner
Watching the furrow that widens behind you,
You shall not think "the past is finished"
Or "the future is before us."
At nightfall, in the rigging and the aerial,
Is a voice descanting (though not to the ear,
The murmuring shell of time, and not in any language)
"Fare forward, you who think that you are voyaging;
You are not those who saw the harbour
Receding, or those who will disembark.
Here between the hither and the farther shore
While time is withdrawn, consider the future
And the past with an equal mind.
At the moment which is not of action or inaction
You can receive this: 'on whatever sphere of being
The mind of a man may be intent
At the time of death'—that is the one action
(And the time of death is every moment)
Which shall fructify in the lives of others:
And do not think of the fruit of action.
Fare forward.
O voyagers, O seamen,
You who come to port, and you whose bodies
Will suffer the trial and judgement of the sea,
Or whatever event, this is your real destination."
So Krishna, as when he admonished Arjuna
On the field of battle.
Not fare well,
But fare forward, voyagers.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

IV

Lady, whose shrine stands on the promontory,
Pray for all those who are in ships, those
Whose business has to do with fish, and
Those concerned with every lawful traffic
And those who conduct them.

Repeat a prayer also on behalf of
Women who have seen their sons or husbands
Setting forth, and not returning:
Figlia del tuo figlio,
Queen of Heaven.

Also pray for those who were in ships, and
Ended their voyage on the sand, in the sea's lips
Or in the dark throat which will not reject them
Or wherever cannot reach them the sound of the sea bell's
Perpetual angelus.

V

To communicate with Mars, converse with spirits,
To report the behaviour of the sea monster,
Describe the horoscope, haruspicate or scry,
Observe disease in signatures, evoke
Biography from the wrinkles of the palm
And tragedy from fingers; release omens
By sortilege, or tea leaves, riddle the inevitable
With playing cards, fiddle with pentagrams
Or barbituric acids, or dissect
The recurrent image into pre-conscious terrors—
To explore the womb, or tomb, or dreams; all these are usual
Pastimes and drugs, and features of the press:
And always will be, some of them especially
When there is distress of nations and perplexity
Whether on the shores of Asia, or in the Edgware Road.
Men's curiosity searches past and future
And clings to that dimension. But to apprehend
The point of intersection of the timeless
With time, is an occupation for the saint—
No occupation either, but something given
And taken, in a lifetime's death in love,
Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender.
For most of us, there is only the unattended
Moment, the moment in and out of time,
The distraction fit, lost in a shaft of sunlight,
The wild thyme unseen, or the winter lightning
Or the waterfall, or music heard so deeply
That it is not heard at all, but you are the music

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

While the music lasts. These are only hints and guesses,
Hints followed by guesses; and the rest
Is prayer, observance, discipline, thought and action.
The hint half guessed, the gift half understood, is Incarnation.
Here the impossible union
Of spheres of existence is actual,
Here the past and future
Are conquered, and reconciled,
Where action were otherwise movement
Of that which is only moved
And has in it no source of movement—
Driven by daemonic, chthonic
Powers. And right action is freedom
From past and future also.
For most of us, this is the aim
Never here to be realised;
Who are only undefeated
Because we have gone on trying;
We, content at the last
If our temporal reversion nourish
(Not too far from the yew-tree)
The life of significant soil.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Notes on Contributors

HANNAH ARENDT, born in Germany in 1906, received her doctoral degree at Heidelberg University. She is the author of *Origins of Totalitarianism; The Human Condition;* and *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewess.*

JAMES BALDWIN, born in New York City in 1924, has been the recipient of several prizes as well as the Rosenwald and Guggenheim fellowships. Besides his articles and stories, his publications include two novels, *Go Tell It on the Mountain* and *Giovanni's Room,* a collection of essays, *Notes of a Native Son,* while a third novel, *Another Country,* is in progress.

THOMAS STEARNS ELIOT, born in St. Louis in 1888, British citizen since 1927, is director of the London publishing house of Faber and Faber. Among the numerous honors conferred on him for his services to literature as poet, dramatist, and critic, he was awarded the Order of Merit and the Nobel Prize in 1948.

ERNEST VAN DEN HAAG, born in 1914, is Adjunct Professor of Social Philosophy at New York University and lecturer at the New School for Social Research. His articles have appeared in numerous periodicals in this country and abroad, and his books are *The Fabric of Society* (with Ralph Ross) and *Education as an Industry.*

OSCAR HANDLIN, born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1915, received his doctor's degree at Harvard University, where he has taught American social history since 1939, and where he is presently director of the Center to Study the History of Liberty in America. In addition to having edited the Library of American Biography and the *Harvard Guide to American History,* he is the author of many works, including *Boston's Immigrants; The Uprooted,* awarded the Pulitzer Prize; *The American People in the Twentieth Century;* and *Al Smith and His America.*

STANLEY EDGAR HYMAN, born in New York City in 1919, is a member of the faculty of Bennington College and also a staff writer for *The New Yorker.* Author of *The Armed Vision: A Study in the Methods of Modern Literary Criticism,* and editor of *The Critical Performance,* he is currently engaged in a study of Darwin, Marx, Frazer, and Freud as imaginative writers.

H. STUART HUGHES, born in New York City in 1916, is professor of history at Harvard University, where he received his doctoral degree. Following wartime service with the OSS in Europe, he was chief of the Division of Research for Europe in the Department of State for two years. His publications include: *An Essay for Our Times; Oswald Spengler: A Critical Estimate; The United States and Italy;* and *Consciousness and Society.*

NORMAN JACOBS, born in New York City in 1914, is educational director of the Tamiment Institute, New York. He received his doctoral degree from New York University, where he now lectures on general education. He has served in the United States Information Agency in London and Paris, and also for

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the Voice of America in Washington and New York. In 1952 he was a member of the United States delegation to the United Nations.

RANDALL JARRELL, born in Nashville, Tennessee, in 1914, is professor of English at the Woman's College of the University of North Carolina. He has been poetry critic for *The Nation, Partisan Review,* and *The Yale Review,* and from 1956 to 1958 was consultant in poetry at the Library of Congress. Among his publications are five volumes of poetry, a book of criticism, *Poetry and the Age,* and a novel, *Pictures from an Institution.* He is at present preparing a translation of *Faust.*

PAUL F. LAZARSFELD, born in Vienna in 1901, is currently Ford Visiting Professor at the Graduate School of Business Education at Harvard University. Since 1940 he has been professor of sociology at Columbia University, Associate Director of the Bureau of Applied Social Research, and consultant on communications in mass media. He was chairman of the June 1959 Seminar on Problems of Mass Culture, from which this issue derives. Among his publications are *Research Memorandum on the Family in the Depression* (with Samuel A. Stouffer); *Radio and the Printed Page; Radio Research* (with Frank Stanton); *The People's Choice; The People Look at Radio* (with Harry Field); and *The Academic Mind* (with Wagner Thielens, Jr.).

WILLIAM I. NICHOLS, born in New York in 1905, has been editor and publisher of *This Week Magazine* since 1955. Educated at Harvard University, he was successively freshman dean at Harvard, advertising and publicity manager for the National Electric Power Company, director of the Harvard University News Office, director of electrical development for the Tennessee Valley Authority, and editor of *Sunset Magazine,* from which he went to *This Week* in 1939. He has edited two anthologies, *Words to Live By,* and *A New Treasury of Words to Live By.*

LEO ROSTEN, born in Lodz, Poland, in 1908, received his doctoral degree from the University of Chicago, where he taught English for two years; later he was on the faculties of New York University, Stanford University, and the New School for Social Research. He has been a consultant for various governmental agencies, and has worked extensively in the field of motion pictures, both as writer and director of research. His publications include: *The Washington Correspondents; The Education of Hyman Kaplan* (under the pseudonym of Leonard Q. Ross) and *The Return of Hyman Kaplan; The Strangest Places; Hollywood: The Movie Colony, The Movie Makers; The Dark Corner; The Religions of America.* He is currently special consultant for *Look* magazine.

ARTHUR SCHLESINGER, JR., born in Columbus, Ohio, in 1917, is professor of history at Harvard University, and has served in a number of responsible posts in government. Besides his many articles on leading issues of the day, he is the author of *The Age of Jackson* (awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1946); *The Vital Center; Orestes A. Browning: A Pilgrim's Progress;* and *The General and the President;* in addition, two of his four volumes on *The Age of Roosevelt (The Crisis of the Old Order* and *The Coming of the New Deal)* have already appeared.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDWARD SHILS, born in 1911, is professor of sociology and social thought, and a member of the Committee on Social Thought, at the University of Chicago. Besides his translation of Karl Mannheim's *Man and Society in an Age of Reconstruction*, he is the author of *The Present State of American Sociology; The Torment of Secrecy: The Background and Consequences of American Security Policies;* and has edited (with Talcott Parsons) *Toward a General Theory of Action.*

FRANK STANTON, born in Muskegon, Michigan, in 1908, has been president of the Columbia Broadcasting System since 1946. He received his doctoral degree in psychology at Ohio State University, and for a time was associated with what has become the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University. Since 1952 he has been chairman of the board for the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences at Stanford, California.

JAMES JOHNSON SWEENEY, born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1900, is director of the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum. From 1935 to 1946 he lectured at the Institute of Fine Arts, New York University, and since 1957 he has been president of the International Art Critics Association. Among his publications are: *Plastic Redirections in Twentieth Century Painting; Alexander Calder; African Folk Tales and Sculpture* (with Paul Radin); and studies of Joan Miró, Marc Chagall, and other artists.

ALEXIS DE TOCQUEVILLE (1805-1859) was sent on a mission to the United States in 1831 to study American penitentiaries. This resulted in his first book, *Du Système Pénitentiaire aux Etats-Unis et de son Application en France* (1833), and then in the work for which he is chiefly known, *La Démocratie en Amérique* (1835, 1840). He was minister for foreign affairs in 1849, was imprisoned briefly following the *coup d'état* of 1851, then retired from political life to write and travel. His last work, *L'Ancien Régime et la Révolution* (1856) was incomplete on his death.

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Recent Issues

These recent issues of *Dædalus* may be ordered from the Wesleyan University Press, 356 Washington Street, Middletown, Connecticut.

THE VISUAL ARTS TODAY *(Winter 1960)*

Contributors: James S. Ackerman, John E. Burchard, Maya Deren, Felix Deutsch, Robert Gardner, James J. Gibson, Sigfried Giedion, E. H. Gombrich, Boris Kaufman, Gyorgy Kepes, Le Corbusier, Margaret Mead, Paul Rand, W. J. H. B. Sandberg, Eduard F. Sekler, Andreas Speiser, Edward Steichen, Paul Weiss, Rudolf Wittkower, and others ($2.50)

QUANTITY AND QUALITY *(Fall 1959)*

Contributors: Karl W. Deutsch, Robert Frost, John G. Kemeny, Lawrence S. Kubie, Harold D. Lasswell, Wassily Leontief, Clarence Morris, Renato Poggioli, S. S. Stevens, Victor F. Weisskopf ($1.25)

CURRENT WORK AND CONTROVERSIES *(Summer 1959)*

Contributors: Solomon Barkin, John C. Bennett, P. W. Bridgman, Edith Cobb, John Dewey, René J. Dubos, A. Hunter Dupree, Hudson Hoagland, Seymour Martin Lipset, Lewis Mumford, Howard Simons, Sumner H. Slichter, John L. Thomas, S. J., and others ($1.25)

MYTH AND MYTHMAKING *(Spring 1959)*

Contributors: Jerome S. Bruner, Joseph Campbell, Richard M. Dorson, Mircea Eliade, Clyde Kluckhohn, Harry Levin, Andrew Lytle, Marshall McLuhan, Henry A. Murray, Mark Schorer, Ernst Topitsch, Robert Lee Wolff ($1.25)

EDUCATION IN THE AGE OF SCIENCE *(Winter 1959)*

Contributors: Arthur Bestor, Douglas Bush, John L. Childs, Sidney Hook, Philippe LeCorbeiller, Margaret Mead, Hans J. Morgenthau, Ernest Nagel, Reinhold Niebuhr, David Riesman, George N. Shuster, and others ($1.25)

ON EVIDENCE AND INFERENCE *(Fall 1958)*

Contributors: Raymond Aron, Martin Deutsch, Erik H. Erikson, Jacob Fine, Henry M. Hart, Jr., Paul F. Lazarsfeld, Daniel Lerner, John T. McNaughton, and others ($1.25)

SYMBOLISM IN RELIGION AND LITERATURE *(Summer 1958)*

Contributors: Kenneth Burke, Werner Heisenberg, Talcott Parsons, I. A. Richards, Paul Tillich, Amos N. Wilder ($1.75)

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

THE AMERICAN NATIONAL STYLE *(Spring 1958)*

Contributors: Niels Bohr, P. W. Bridgman, Abraham Kaplan, George F. Kennan, Clyde Kluckhohn, Henry A. Murray, Linus Pauling, W. W. Rostow, Edward Teller ($1.75)

SCIENCE AND THE MODERN WORLD VIEW *(Winter 1958)*

Contributors: P. W. Bridgman, Harcourt Brown, Jerome S. Bruner, Philipp Frank, Henry Guerlac, Howard Mumford Jones, Charles Morris, Robert Oppenheimer, Giorgio de Santillana, and others ($1.75)

PRODUCED BY UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED